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SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

This issue:
Fiction from:
John Wyndham
Jürgen von Scheidt
Delia Leslie
Art by:
Bob Fowke
David Pelham
Bob Layzell

Plus
Crossword
competition

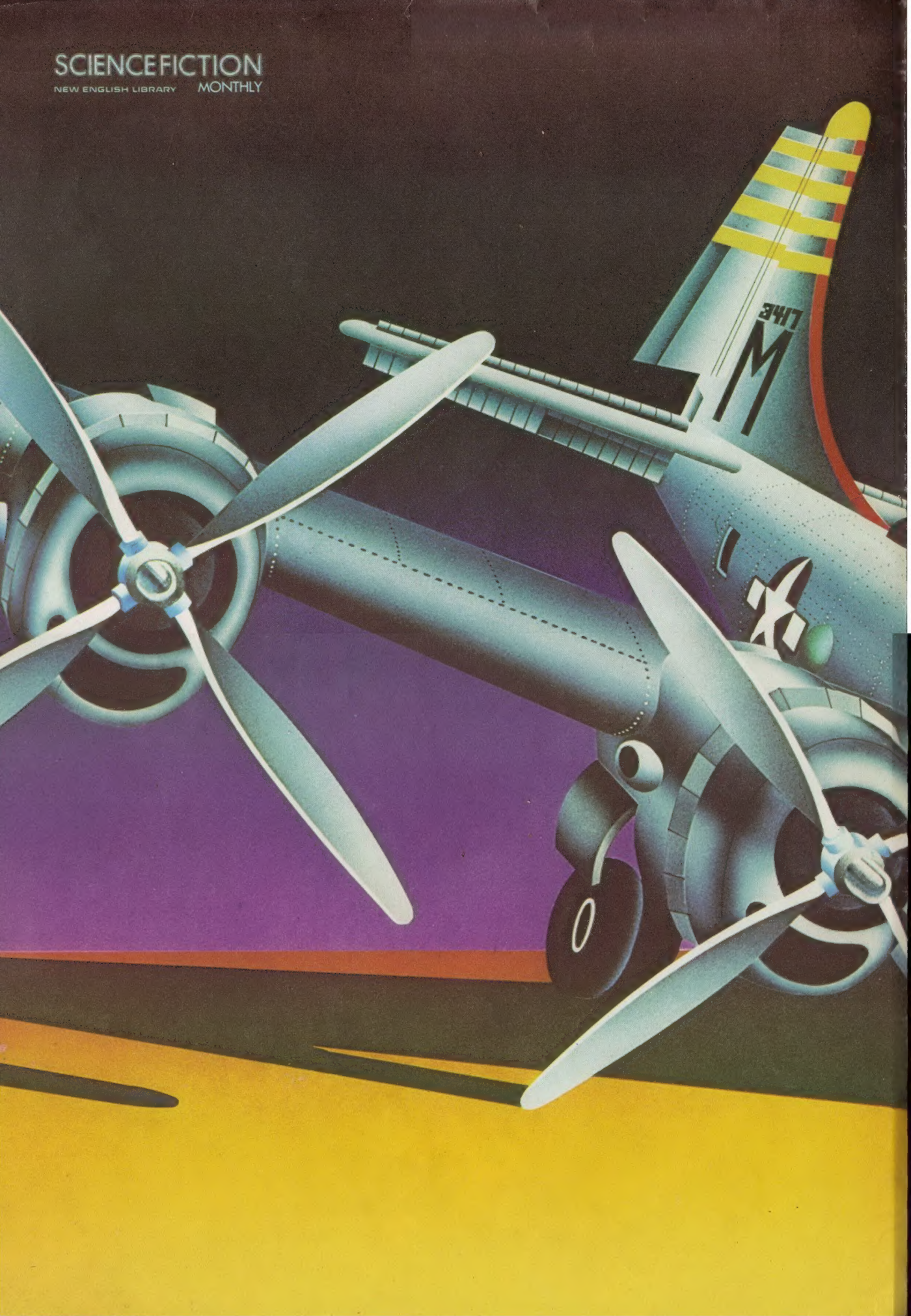
A study
of aliens
in science fiction

Philip José Farmer
– the author who
dispensed with the
stiff upper lip of
science fiction

Plus a super Poster offer

SCIENCE FICTION

NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY MONTHLY



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Editor: Patricia Hornsey
Editorial Assistant: Julie Davis
Art Director: Cecil Smith
Art Editor: Michael Osborn
Designer: Stephen Knowlden
Circulation Manager: Peter Lidbury
Advertising Manager: John E. Tedbury
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Cover: Painting by David Pelham

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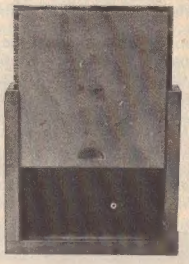

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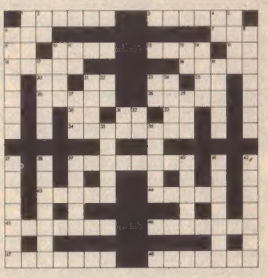


Crossword Competition No 3 **4**

WHY WE'VE HAD TO GO UP TO 30p
We apologise to readers for the increase in price of *SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY*. This is due to the steep rise in paper and production costs since the beginning of the year, over which we have had no control.

HIS friends were beating the drum trees. The familiar sound led him on his way through the fire bog; he could not see the flaming threads of gas, only now and again could he feel their heat when he came too close. He walked upright and sure-footed and no longer depended on his stick to guide him. Then he became aware of the vast bulk of buildings in front of him, so alien to this planet, which he himself had helped to build. But that was a long time ago.

The machine was not yet running. Otherwise he would have distinctly felt it.

Who would be on guard duty today, he wondered. Strange that the people at the Station lived in fear of the vetrocanti. To himself and his friends the hairy monsters did no harm. But then there were reasons enough—

When he got to the entrance he became tense. He sniffed the air as if to test it. Soon his olfactory cells too would be atrophied. He did not like the sterile air inside the Station, which was exactly adjusted to conditions on Earth. Although he too had almost been killed by the surfeit of carbon dioxide on Gomorrah—that time in the past.

He pulled himself together and groped his way forward to where his sense of touch and memory told him the great door must be. There was no reason at all why he should hesitate. It would not be for long that he would have to miss the whispering of the telepathic prairie gliders, whose simple tales never penetrated the massive steel walls of the Station. And the hot wind blowing down onto the plains from the craters of the volcanoes would soon caress his cheeks again.

Soon, very soon, he would visit Maureen on the other side of the planet. He would show her the way.

He bent forward, touched the contact.

The shadow of his stooping figure fell across the translucent door of bluish quartz. Nobody looked at it. Then the warning light flashed on. A section of the door flapped open, a puff of hot poison-laden air wafted in, stung the men's noses, and for a second the loud banging of the giant tree drums could be heard.

Startled, the two guards jumped out of their seats. With practised speed their hands went to their ray guns.

'Ah, it's you, Thomas. You really have a nasty way of frightening people!' one of them shouted.

The blind man raised his head, listening, while he felt his way along the wall with the sensitive tips of his yellow-skinned fingers. He did not answer. Only the excited flutter of the lids over his dead eyeballs belied his apparent indifference. As though in a gesture of defence he pulled his torn slouch hat, whose dirty colour was unpleasantly reminiscent of Gomorrah's sky, further down over his face. Until his eyes were hidden.

At the back of the long high hall another door opened noiselessly.

'What's going on?'

'Nothing to worry about, Chief, it's only Thomas, from the colony.'

'Take him to the canteen and give him something decent to eat. But don't make a stir, because of the new chaps.'

'All right, Chief.'

When the door had closed again, one of the guards walked up to the blind man and took his hand. 'Come on, Thomas, I'm sure there will be something good today. Whenever you come to visit us we've always got something nice for you.'

'For Pete's sake', muttered the other guard, 'don't talk to him as if he were a child. He's got a lot more brains than you have.' His curiosity aroused, he stepped up to the emaciated figure. 'Look at this: he's starting it now too, that growth there behind the right ear.'

The blind man seemed to take no notice of them. He raised a wasted arm and pointed in the direction of the corridor. His chapped bloodless lips mumbled incomprehensible words.

'Poor devil', said the first guard. 'Soon he will be dumb as well.' Then he took him by his right hand, which was nervously groping about, and slowly led him along. The other guard sat down again behind his desk as the rules demanded. He was about to record the incident in the Station book. But he was unable to concentrate. He could not get away from the thought that this blind, almost deaf and soon also dumb human being had once been his friend, that Thomas Alvarez had once been an engineer in the department for solid-state physics on the planet Gomorrah. And now two men constantly had to guard the entrance because those who had remained healthy were afraid of the others who had fallen ill. Of course there was also a psychological explanation. But that was even more disagreeable . . .

Everyone in the canteen was very kind to Thomas. Nearly all of them knew him from the time when he worked at the Station. John Lee Hooler, the new dynamics expert, looked at him, flabbergasted at his appearance. He did not yet know that in a few months' time he would probably look exactly the same.

The guard who had brought him in chose a meal for Thomas from the automat; a tender steak with pommes frites, green salad, and a vanilla-flavoured mousse. When, half an hour later, he looked in again he found Thomas still sitting in front of the food. The steak and pommes frites had long gone cold. He had not even tasted them.

'He's not hungry, I guess', said the dynamics expert, to whom it had meanwhile been explained that Thomas Alvarez was one of the engineers and theoretical physicists whose health had been wrecked during the experiments with the matter-transmitter. 'Perhaps it is too hot for him outside, or he wants to rest a bit.'

'For hours the temperature out there has remained constant at forty-nine degrees centigrade. You call that hot? Compared with the hellish climate we usually have?'

'Oh well, how do I know why he has come in. If he would only do something, just anything. This motionless staring in front of him is getting on my nerves.'

'Not everybody can be as lively as you', said the guard, slightly irritated.

'Okay, okay.' The young dynamics expert went across to the gaudy illuminated juke-box and inserted a coin. It disappeared with a clatter and another little coloured light came on. For the first time he consciously read the inscription on the small brass plate above the coin slot: *For Our Blind.*

'Doesn't the government on Earth provide for our blind?' He asked in astonishment, turning to the other men in the canteen. There was that slightly naive undertone in his voice which few of them could suppress when confronted with the problem for the first time. Each one of his colleagues could have explained to him: that the solar planetary system was light-years away, that the government on Earth did not care a damn what happened to the men on Gomorrah . . . that the few coins in the juke-box did nothing to help their blind . . . that it was merely a comradely gesture . . . but why all this fuss—All the same, Hooler's words must have had some effect on them, for suddenly they all looked at him and a frighteningly uniform expression of bitterness passed over their faces.

'Idiot', said Lindhuth, the radiation expert, though the word implied neither insult nor reproach. Hooler could only infer pity from the way it was said. And then he remembered the contract he had signed on Earth, four or five weeks ago. Together with the telemechanic Aizerman. His ebony-black face became shiny. He could think fast about a problem once he had sufficient data at his disposal. A dry retching seized him and he quickly averted his eyes from the blind man, who was still crouching on his chair like an ancient statue before the food, now cold, on the immaculate white table-cloth. The only one in the room not looking at him was Thomas Alvarez. He might have been dead.

Again Hooler read the inscription on the brass plate. *For Our Blind.* He could not take his eyes off it. Were there more people like Alvarez? He remembered having seen such little plates before, in other parts of the very extensive research station. He quickly glanced over the list of records to distract himself.

Blind. Idiot. Idiotic pop music. Blind a whole life long, might as well be dead, cold and dead. Beside ninety-nine pop tunes there was a Bach record. Johann Sebastian Bach, born . . . Beethoven became deaf. But blind, what is it like to be blind? Prelude and Fugue in B minor. Organ. A snatch of melody . . . Idiot! Blind idiot! Organ . . .

Furious with himself and his incoherent thoughts which confused the functioning, normally so logical, of his technician's brain, he pressed the key F/17. With a rattling sound the machine awoke to its programmed existence. It had no will of its own. But what had that to do with blindness . . .

A dozen records went by before the selector pulled out the right one and deposited it on the table. The pick-up slid busily down onto the transparent disc and clicked into the first groove. The vibrato of a mighty organ filled the low unadorned room. The other men who had been staring at Hooler all this time now looked at each other inquiringly. While the record was playing there was at first no other sound to be heard. Later, mingling with the boom of the organ, there came another sound which did not belong and yet was somehow, in a curious way, perfectly fitting. It came from where Thomas was sitting. The blind man held a mouth organ in his thin hands and with his parched lips drew from the instrument a melody which affected them all in a strange way. It was in fact only a continuous chain of sounds, a melody reduced to its basic elements.

'What gave him the idea of playing just at this moment?' asked Hooler. He thought of a bar in Detroit, in the Negro quarter, of his technical training in a steel mill, of Claudette-Baby . . .

'They also serve who only stand and wait . . .' John Milton once wrote when he was going blind.

Am I willing to serve? thought Hooler.

Lindhuth: 'The music must have stimulated him. What, by the way, Hooler, made you play that Bach record?'

Does he really think I know nothing but jazz, just because I am a Negro? Hooler thought for a while. 'Why should the record have stimulated him', he said dubiously, 'he's almost deaf, isn't he?'

'Perhaps he has felt the deep vibrations — '

'Yes, but not the infra-vibrations of the organ, but the vibrations of the ypprotron.'

'You are dead right', said another. They distinctly felt the rhythmic thud of the machine in action, whose enormous coils and tubes deep below them in the rocky soil of Gomorrah provided the powerful accompaniment to Thomas' playing. With a grating sound the record came to an end and automatically returned to the selection drum. Thomas Alvarez played on.

Stevenbourg: 'He may be remembering the work he used to do at the Station.'

Qun-ming, the electronics man: 'Guess that is all he came for. Wanted to hear the matter-transmitter.'

Hooler: 'He meditates on his mouth organ. Do you hear what he is playing? That's the Blues. Like the old Country Blues.' If he would only stop this agonising tune . . . 'You all talk too much.'

Taken aback, they fell silent. They moved closer to the blind man who played an unending sequence of melancholy notes, notes which told of the tragedy of being blind, of his suffering and of the sufferings of the men who, like himself, had to live in the poisonous hell of Gomorrah without sight and without protection, because no one must be allowed to know that it even existed. Because nobody was to learn of the dangerous nature of the experiments which were carried out in this world. But Hooler also heard short light-hearted snatches of sound in this music, which he could not quite place. True, the Blues are not all sadness, he thought, again and again gaiety breaks through, down in the dumps—up in the sky.

That black guitarist who played with the broken-off neck of a bottle as in the old days, what was his name, wasn't it Stormy Weather? Claudette-Baby was a revelation, when you held her tight in your arms in the smoky twilight of the dance floor, quite close to you, ears and head and swinging body full of the rhythmic thud of the Blues, she was so soft, so warm. so . . .

Lindhuth: 'Whatever makes him play the Blues?'

'Shut up, don't keep interrupting with your silly questions.'

They crouched at the feet of the blind man listening to him, became like children, shut their eyes and tried to imagine how it is, a world without light, without colour—only to open them again, wide and startled, because Thomas' tune told them something quite different from what they thought that endless darkness to be. Only the Negro John Lee Hooler, the dynamics expert with two academic degrees, felt the other thing too, that which was not sad, not dark, the bright otherness. But he could not understand it either. How was this poor devil to know joy, how am I to know joy one day, when I consider how my light is spent, e're half my days, in this dark world and wide. He wanted to clap his hands in a hard forward-pressing rhythm. He wanted to dance, wanted to dance the fear out of his system. That booming killing ypprotron. Bach swings too, that is because of the strings, which reverberate like the big bass drum when the drummer beats it, when the brushes flit over the tightly stretched skin as if by themselves, it hisses like . . .

Deep below them the giant field generator produced its own rhythm while for the thousandth time the attempt was made to teleport a metal sphere with the most appropriate diameter of one millimetre over a distance of the most convenient length of eight metres. And this rhythm ate into the bodies of

'When I consider how my light is spent, E're half my days, in this dark world and wide . . .'
John Milton, On His Blindness

BLINDNESS

By Jürgen vom Scheidt

Ray Winder

the men and caused an uncontrolled output of hormones, which in turn led to the gradual destruction of their senses.

But Thomas Alvarez's harmonica had yet more to tell.

When the ypprotron in the subterranean hall stopped its roar, because the majority of the experimenting technicians, as was only to be expected, were rolling and twitching in convulsions on the steel gratings, a hundred metres higher up the mouth organ too stopped. Thomas sat hunched amidst a circle of exhausted men who were still listening to him breathlessly. His hat, battered past recognition, lay beside him, a dirty grey. Beads of perspiration rolled slowly, reluctantly over his wrinkled forehead. They made channels through the incrustation of dust, which lay like armour-plating on that forehead, and exposed thin lines of pale skin. At last, with trembling fingers, he put the misshapen mouth organ into an inner pocket of his coat. Now that the hat no longer concealed his head, the men around him could clearly see the spidery web of the growth. Spreading from the eyes and ears, it entirely covered the hairless scalp beneath the outermost layer of skin. The growth had already reach its final stage. This would be Thomas Alvarez's last visit to the station. From now on he would no longer leave the colony of blind men who communicated with each other by means of the infra-sound waves of their tree drums and sought their food in the luxuriant fungi thickets, like a new species of animal.

Hooler said pensively: 'I wonder if the blind, cut off from their former environment, continue to think and reason like other human beings. Whatever the psychiatrists may say to the contrary, a normal human being does not suddenly become a cretin just because his sense organs no longer function. Why should they not go further and think on entirely different lines? A genius remains a genius, even if he is blind and deaf and dumb — '

But no one listened to him. Wide-eyed they stared at Thomas who had got clumsily to his feet, groping around him for support, tottering a little. Since he had stopped playing his lips incessantly murmured incomprehensible words, like an ancient sorcerer's incantations. His inexplicable gestures created a strange mood and a tension which gradually mounted until it seized them all and included them in the geometry of these movements.

Hooler: With these gestures he wipes out old modes of behaviour, making room for new ones; he knows exactly what he wants. And in us he arouses not only fear but anger as well. When will someone break the spell, with a jest, a laugh, a blasphemy; when will someone jump up furiously and shake off the magic, as one would repel the molestations of a witch-doctor, a Voodoo priest, who wants to turn us all into zombies without a will of their own, into non-dead . . .

Thomas Alvarez made a visible effort to speak. His larynx too must already have been badly affected, for nothing but a croaking sound emerged from his toothless mouth. Hooler, who had automatically stretched out his arms towards him, uttered a soft cry. He had not expected that these fragile looking hands still possessed so much strength. The blind man, still croaking unintelligibly, moved his hands along the Negro's arms and slowly slid them over his shoulders. The almost transparent fingers, their blue mesh of veins clearly visible, crept up to Hooler's throat. The Negro did not know what to do. He broke out in a sweat. Then he noticed that Thomas carefully ran his fingers over his roughhewn features, reading in them as in an open book, his eyes, his nose, his mouth —the oldest alphabet of the blind. When Alvarez let go of Hooler everybody sighed with relief. Yet the blind man had not yet finished. Again he reached out in search of help, this time in a different direction. Spontaneously Lindhuth took his arms. And was subjected to the same kind of exploration.

Then at last they understood what Alvarez wanted from them.

'Fetch Dollard—he was his closest friend and colleague!'

'He'll hardly be available at the moment. He's down with the machine, checking the cybernetics—'

'Never mind. I'll answer for that.' It was the Chief, who had come in unnoticed some time ago. If the strange sight of the technicians squatting round the blind man had surprised him, he did not show it. 'Alvarez obviously has something important to tell us. Look at his gestures—he probably wants something to write with. Quick, get some writing materials! When I think that he was our best man—'

'Fetch Dollard! Get writing things!'

'Could he possibly—' but the Chief kept his conjecture to himself. Somebody rushed off to fetch James Dollard, the quantum specialist; the intercom had broken down as usually happened after these experiments. Someone else got paper and a large pencil.

They pressed the pencil into Alvarez' thin hand which immediately closed tightly around it. They guided his hand over the large sheet of paper and gently set it down on the white surface.

Ypprotron field strength not
increase
reduce!
field oversaturated!
no effect on sphere

His hand, almost clenched into a fist, scrawled these words clumsily in large shaky letters. When Dollard came panting up and deciphered the few words, he said in amazement:

'This could indeed be a possibility. We have always assumed that it would be enough to dematerialise the sphere, dispatch it along a conducting frequency and reconstitute it at the receiving end in accordance with the stored model of the molecular structure—'

Hooler: 'Too much energy would affect the potential-barrier between the two places, wouldn't it?'

Dollard: 'Quite possible, that may be what he means. We were going to investigate this next year with the P-series—'

The Chief: 'Must be checked immediately. Qun-ming, you heat up your H-tubes, all three of them, to the maximum, but keep to minimum emission. Trial run. Watkins, you start up the small pile. Lindhuth—'

Dollard: 'Shouldn't we look after Thomas first and wait until the casualties are put to bed? The fall-out was very high again today—seven victims.' And turning to Alvarez: 'How are you, Thomas?'

Disconcerted, Dollard stopped short. He realised that the blind man could no longer understand his well-meant words. Rather helplessly he laid his hands on Thomas' hands.

Alvarez slid to the floor and pulled Dollard down with him. As he sat there, his emaciated arms hugging his knees, his dead eyes staring into space, he resembled an unbelievably old desiccated mummy rather than a distinguished physicist. He seemed to be concentrating very hard, for the furrows on his high domed forehead deepened still further and knotted veins stood out on his temples. As before, when he played the mouth organ, they all stared at him, holding their breath, completely under the spell of this human figure and his seemingly unmotivated actions.

Then suddenly they all cried out together.

Hooler: 'He has moved!'

'Moved' was perhaps not the right word. *'Changed'* would have been better. They spun round, looked at him incredulously. Alvarez had changed his place. He no longer sat inside the circle, but outside it. Like an inflated rubber doll from which the air was escaping, he slowly collapsed, his back against the bare windowless wall. He appeared unconscious.

'He has shifted three metres along a conducting frequency, without moving a muscle', groaned Dollard.

'He has discovered the secret of the transmission of matter by mental power', Hooler said awed.

'Teleportation? Impossible! What's the trick?' gasped Lindhuth.

'He obviously has never given up working on the problem', said Dollard. 'When he no longer had his instruments and apparatus at his disposal he sought other means. Yes, why should one not be able to approach the problem from both sides—'

'The outer universe', said Hooler,

'and the inner universe—'

'We must examine him closely', ordered the Chief. 'We must find out how he does it—even if we have to take him to pieces like one of our defective machines!'

Thomas Alvarez could not have heard these words, but his stony old man's face suddenly lost its rigidity. His strained features relaxed. He smiled. Like a small boy.

'Hold him!' shouted the Chief, alarmed, and threw himself with all his weight on top of the blind man.

With a strange noise air rushed into the vacuum left behind by the disappearance of Alvarez's body. The sheet of paper was whirled up in the eddy and sucked down again to the spot where the blind man had been sitting a moment ago.

'He has outwitted us!' cried the Chief in utter frustration.

'Did we deserve any better?' said Hooler. He thought of a smoke-filled Negro bar in Chicago, of another in Detroit, of the heat and the fumes and the noise of the steel mill, of a girl's body, of a whiff of perfume like almond blossom, of the jungles and swamps of Gomorrah . . .

He went across to the juke-box. An obscure Blues band started to play and set the old box rattling. Hooler rapped out the beat on the domed perspex top. Tapped and hummed—*For Our Blind.* Until the Chief, his face red with anger, pulled the plug out of the mains.

They glared at each other in silence. Then the Chief turned on his heel and left the room.

'Get stuffed!' Hooler called after him before the door slammed to. The noise reminded him a little of that other noise which accompanied the disappearance of Thomas Alvarez. He bent down and pushed the plug back into the socket. The Blues band blared forth again from where it had stopped. Tears filled Hooler's brown eyes and streamed down his black face. But his mouth was laughing, his throat was laughing, his body was filled with liberating laughter, and his legs moved to the rhythm of the music.

The familiar glug-glug of the liquid in the man-high bottle trees told him the way. He no longer needed to see their orange-coloured phosphorescence, which had guided him in the first few months. Thomas Alvarez knew exactly when to dodge dangerous bog holes, because the ground under his feet had a different spring, a different softness. He could hardly feel the steady drip on his scalp any more. But the regular ticking of the horonauts, some of which always hovered close above him, confirmed the presence of friendly creatures. He knew their rhythm well. It had taken him a long time to attune them to himself. The one who ticked differently could only be from Steffen Kullasan's swarm..

He had to gather fresh energy. The drum trees were silent. The large mass of the Station lay behind him. He felt the increasing vibration of the ground as the ypprotron started up. Before the pounding became intolerable he thought 'Maureen!'

Again air rushed into a vacuum. The horonauts remained behind. Patiently they kept ticking on his frequency. A vetrocantus roared nearby. His two females answered coyly.

The bluish translucent quartz door of the Station sprang open. Two men in protective suits stepped out, slowly and awkwardly. In their clumsily gloved hands they held long-barrelled ray guns.

(Translated by Margaret D Howie)

Jürgen vom Scheidt

was born in 1940 in Leipzig. He studied psychology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology, passing examinations in Munich in 1967 which made him a certified psychologist. After practical work, mainly in the field of drug misuse, he edited, with W Schmidbauer, a Handbuch der Rauschdrogen (*Handbook of Narcotics*), *which appeared in 1971. He was also editor of a collection of studies on drug misuse by juveniles entitled* Drogenabhängigkeit (*Dependence on Drugs*) *and of a science-fiction anthology* Das Monster im Park (*The Monster in the Park*). *A study on Sigmund Freud's cocaine experiments, a social-pedagogical dissertation on the subject of* Jugendliche Haschischraucher und ihre Behandlung (*Young Hashish-Smokers and their Treatment*), *and a science-fiction novel are close to completion.*

Crossword Competition

WIN A COPY OF NEL'S NEW ANTHOLOGY OF SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, *STOPWATCH*, EDITED BY GEORGE HAY!

All you have to do is complete the crossword and send it in with the entry form. The prize will be awarded to the senders of the first three correct entries opened.

RULES

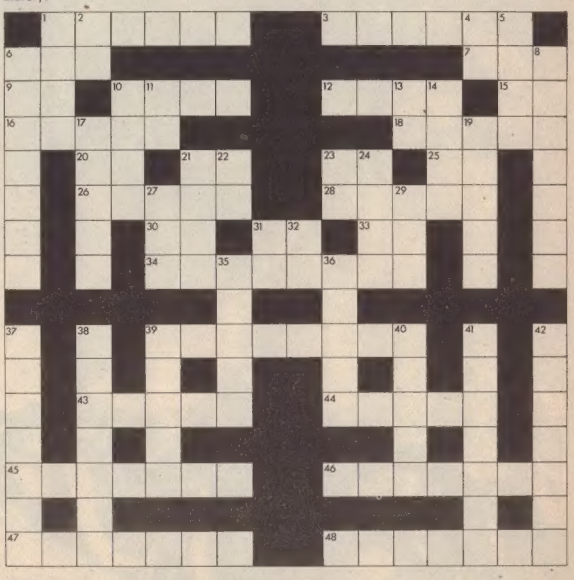
1. All entries for the competition should be accompanied by a completed entry form and sent to: The Editor, SFM Crossword Competition No 3, Barnard's Inn, Holborn EC1 2JR, to arrive not later than 8 October 1974.
2. Entries should be sent in an envelope clearly marked 'SFM Crossword Competition No 3' in the top left-hand corner. Those who do not wish to cut their copy of SFM may draw the frame onto a piece of plain paper and send that in instead.
3. The winner will be notified as soon as possible after 8 October 1974 and the correct solution and the name of the winner will be published in Issue 12 of SFM. The editor's decision must be accepted as final.
4. The competition is not open to employees, their parents, spouses or children of New English Library.

CLUES ACROSS

1 Editor of *Amazing Stories* in the 1940s (6)
3 Author of *Strange Relations* (6)
6 A diving bird of which the greatest is now extinct (3)
7 This Aries was not at all sheep-like (3)
9 Initially Robert Silverberg and Randall Garrett in collaboration (2)
10 This type of door invites the unknown (4)
12 Author of the *Unorthodox Engineers* series (4)
15 What Poul Anderson and Pennsylvania have in common (2)
16 To quench (5)
18 This author calls the tune (5)
20 Phonetically phi (2)
21 Elementary Chromium (2)
23 In short, Theodore Cogswell (2)
25 This Chad Oliver is not limited (2)
26 Earth's alien cognomen (5)
28 A thick oily liquid formed by the condensation of acetaldehyde (5)
30 Would Arnold Young agree this way? (2)
31 Is Idris Seabright to be? (2)
33 Isaac Asimov to start with (2)
34 Even in sf, this day never comes (8)
39 The author whose *Glory Road* started 24 years earlier (8)
43 The second dimension (5)
44 Pertaining to elves (5)
45 Sonic discharge (7)
46 Magazine produced by sf fans (7)
47 British author of *Men, Martians and Machines* (7)
48 Fluorine, Chlorine, Bromine and Iodine are of this saintly group (7)

CLUES DOWN

1 A murmuring flow (4)
2 Initially artist Arnold Kohn (2)
4 Hesitantly Edward Rementer (2)
5 *The ---- of the Solar System* by Leslie Stone (*Amazing*, December 1934). A rare word in early sf (4)
8 ------- *and Old Lace* (7)
11 Weinbaum's odyssey (7)
10 James Blish's series of cities in flight (4)
11 Paul Ernst for fitness (2)
13 Peter Phillips (2)
14 One billionth (4)
17 Towards stern hesitation, not before (5)
19 Penguins of the south, but this bear's of the north (5)
21 Colder than 19 down (4)
22 Robert Abernathy's claim to Egyptology (2)
23 Polite Tantalum (2)
24 The Muse of History (4)
27 Does one still live in Hamelin? (3)
29 Initially Wollheim's books (3)
31 Ionium in short (2)
32 Before Delany (2)
35 The pseudo-surname of David McIlwain (5)
36 The officer of a shire (5)
37 The primary of Ganymede and Callisto (7)
38 Gases (7)
39 An author whose name makes sense (5)
40 Author of *World of Ptavvs* (5)
41 The next most difficult manoeuvre to launching (7)
42 Small water container (7)



SFM Crossword Competition No 3

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

Painting by Bob Fowke
SCIENCE FICTION
NEW ENGLISH LIBRARY
MONTHLY

the Artist in Science Fiction

By Aune R Butt

Pelham, David. Born: 12 May 1938. Studied: St Martin's School of Art, London. Art Director of Penguin Books and sf artist. Work includes covers for JG Ballard's *The Drowned World, The Drought, The Wind From Nowhere* and *The Terminal Beach.*

David Pelham differs from all the other sf artists interviewed so far in this magazine in that he is not a freelance artist but the Art Director of one of the biggest paperback publishers in this country. His claim to the title of 'sf artist' rests mainly on four superb covers for JG Ballard's *The Drought, The Drowned World, The Wind From Nowhere* and *The Terminal Beach*. Although responsible for the new look on Penguin book covers for the past six years, Pelham says of his own Ballard illustrations: 'This is the sort of subject matter that I want to be involved with when I'm wearing my illustrator's hat, and which gives me the biggest lift to do. There was a time when I was very interested in scientific apparatus, machines and life-support systems, and I found book covers of this type imposed disciplines on me which forced me to refine my images down to their most fundamental forms.'

Pelham came to illustration initially through the visual stimuli of such artists as Konrad Klapheck, Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Lindner whom he considers to be far ahead of the present day in their ideas. His interest in sf came later and was triggered off by the novels of Ballard. Pelham found himself extremely sympathetic to the arid, barren, bleached-out landscapes depicted therein, even to the extent of sharing Ballard's obsessions with dereliction and decay.

Pelham describes his illustrations as 'uncompromising, brutal and savage'; machines appear starkly and incongruously against a background of frightening simplicity—and present a philosophy of the future in picture form. To Pelham these machines are the debris of our society: 'I've a big thing about machines and their subsequent breakdown; I love the idea of all this work going into making a machine and then it not working or being left redundant.'

Pelham explains his outlook in

Painting by David Pelham

terms of a simple but important analogy: as many people find romance in viewing previous epochs, so he finds romance in seeing the future as if it were *already* the past—in visualising ruins created from the artifacts we are manufacturing now. Like Albert Speer, the architect of Hitler's Third Reich, who designed buildings incorporating a ruin factor, Pelham sees something remarkable and grand in the built-in obsolescence of the temporary monuments he portrays. Writers like Ballard and Harry Harrison (whose novel *Make Room! Make Room!* was filmed as *Soylent Green*) are seen by Pelham as prophets who are 'nostalgic for the future' in the same way. He sees future mankind as rising above the age of machines, bypassing them, and

THE DROUGHT by JG Ballard. Painting by David Pelham (Courtesy Penguin Books)

seeing them merely as the 'debris of science.' He continues: 'Possibly we will be able to take the lessons of our technology and be far more selective in the way that we use it; we will be masters of our machines and not dominated by them as we are now. We will then transcend our fetish with the machine and finally discover the fact that we can do more with less.'

What this really adds up to is a complex view of the future which has been carefully worked out over a period of time. As Pelham says, 'I draw my romance from reality, from facts. I'm not fantasising. This is what science fiction means to me.' What it means to anyone who sees his

THE DROWNED WORLD by JG Ballard. Painting by David Pelham (Courtesy Penguin Books)

paintings is an almost eerie juxtaposition of the ultra-modern (saloon-car, Centurion tank) into a totally alien and frighteningly barren background.

David Pelham planned his career as an extension of his art training, so that he covered both book and magazine art-work, and then took time off to spend a couple of years in a finishing studio learning, among other things, to perfect the air-brush technique. The specialised knowledge Pelham gained there lay dormant for some years because he went on to be firstly art director of another studio and then of *Harper's Bazaar* where he learnt about photography and other aspects of visual communication.

In his present position as Art Director of Penguin Books he has been conscious of some frustration in always managing the creations of other people: 'One finds oneself doing an awful lot of nailbiting, worrying about schedules and not being in the right mood to create anything oneself. There's a dichotomy there and I find I have to discipline myself enormously in the two roles.'

Working in the studio with Wolf Spoerl and producing finished art-work which was second to none in quality has made Pelham develop an

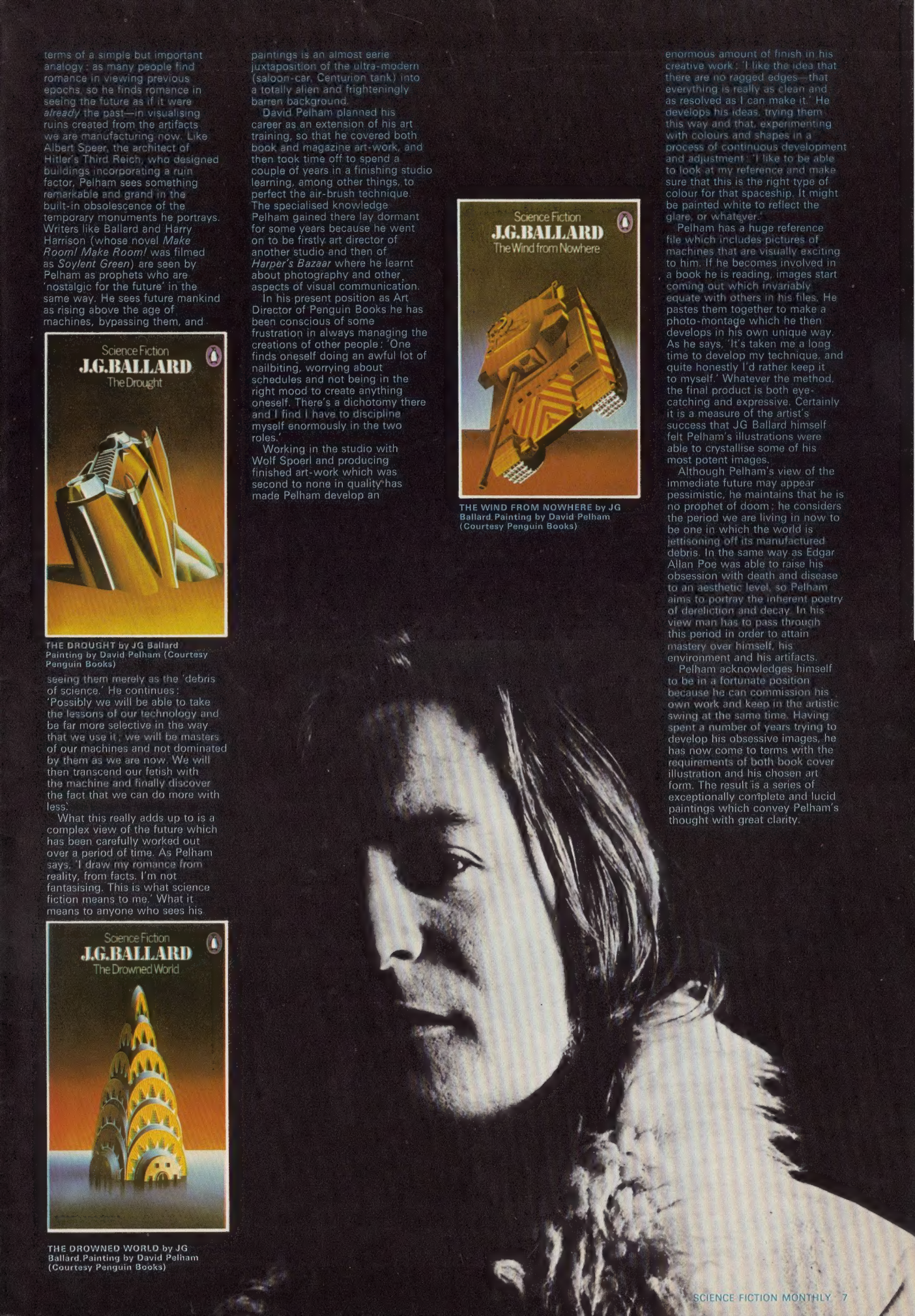
THE WIND FROM NOWHERE by JG Ballard. Painting by David Pelham (Courtesy Penguin Books)

enormous amount of finish in his creative work: 'I like the idea that there are no ragged edges—that everything is really as clean and as resolved as I can make it.' He develops his ideas, trying them this way and that, experimenting with colours and shapes in a process of continuous development and adjustment: 'I like to be able to look at my reference and make sure that this is the right type of colour for that spaceship. It might be painted white to reflect the glare, or whatever.'

Pelham has a huge reference file which includes pictures of machines that are visually exciting to him. If he becomes involved in a book he is reading, images start coming out which invariably equate with others in his files. He pastes them together to make a photo-montage which he then develops in his own unique way. As he says, 'It's taken me a long time to develop my technique, and quite honestly I'd rather keep it to myself.' Whatever the method, the final product is both eye-catching and expressive. Certainly it is a measure of the artist's success that JG Ballard himself felt Pelham's illustrations were able to crystallise some of his most potent images.

Although Pelham's view of the immediate future may appear pessimistic, he maintains that he is no prophet of doom: he considers the period we are living in now to be one in which the world is jettisoning off its manufactured debris. In the same way as Edgar Allan Poe was able to raise his obsession with death and disease to an aesthetic level, so Pelham aims to portray the inherent poetry of dereliction and decay. In his view man has to pass through this period in order to attain mastery over himself, his environment and his artifacts.

Pelham acknowledges himself to be in a fortunate position because he can commission his own work and keep in the artistic swing at the same time. Having spent a number of years trying to develop his obsessive images, he has now come to terms with the requirements of both book cover illustration and his chosen art form. The result is a series of exceptionally complete and lucid paintings which convey Pelham's thought with great clarity.



Modern Masters of Science Fiction

By Walter Gillings

Robert McAulay

Whatever the pen-name he used, he wrote stories that people believed in . . . and he was writing science fiction twenty years before *The Day of the Triffids* dawned.

3: JOHN WYNDHAM

Bookshop browsers look puzzled when, among the paperbacks on the bottom shelf, they discover some bearing the by-line, 'John Wyndham writing as John Beynon'. When they find inside the name John Beynon Harris, their mystification grows. All the world knows John Wyndham, creator of the sinister *Triffids* and the not less sinister *Midwich Cuckoos*. But who is—or was—John Beynon, author of *The Secret People* and *Stowaway to Mars*?

None who have read him, under one name or the other, can possibly have mistaken his English origins. Son of a Welsh barrister, he was born in a Warwickshire village in 1903 and baptised John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris, leaving him ample scope for pen-names. Educated at seven different schools, he was destined for farming at 18, then decided to follow in his father's footsteps; but he failed his entrance exams for Oxford, finding more to fascinate him in the Science Museum.

At length advertising claimed him, and brought out his flair for wordcraft. Captivated by Wells in his schooldays, he turned to writing crime and horror stories but had little success in selling them. Then, in 1929, he came across a copy of *Amazing Stories* in a London hotel lounge. He was so intrigued that he sought out all the back issues he could find and, deciding that America might prove a more receptive market for his work, settled down to write science fiction.

His first success was achieved with only three words—'Future Flying Fiction'. They brought him a $100 prize in a slogan contest run by Hugo Gernsback's *Air Wonder Stories*—which didn't last long enough to make use of the catchline. But the magazine was combined with *Wonder Stories*, in which John B Harris first appeared in 1931 with *Worlds to Barter*, a novel variation on the paradoxical time-travel theme which was provoking bitter argument in the readers' letter columns.

He returned to the theme after two years with *Wanderers of Time*, in which his travellers were stranded at a dead spot in the time stream, in a world dominated by insects. But most notable among his contributions to *Wonder* were two interplanetary stories which dared to introduce serious sociological and philosophical ideas—*Exiles on Asperus* and *The Venus Adventure*. The Venus story, which he always intended to expand to a novel but never did, he considered his best—'because it is the simplest'.

His short stories, too, were conspicuous for their sympathetic treatment of comparatively simple concepts; for he had no time for the complex 'thought-variant' featured by *Astounding* or the gusty 'space opera' with its cosmic cowboys and Indians. And he constantly rebelled against the term 'science fiction', as adopted by Gernsback. 'Never', he once wrote, 'was a well-intentioned genre more bedevilled by a smirched label and a monstrous percentage of dross.'

Such little gems as *Spheres of Hell* and *The Man from Beyond* were rare among the mass of crude ore which kept the pulps going through the Depression years. His careful touch and convincing prose made John Beynon's tales just right for reprinting in Britain's first science fiction magazine, *Tales of Wonder*, when it appeared in 1937. And although the texture of science fiction has changed considerably since then, these same stories are so artfully contrived that they are acceptable today to readers who never suspected that John Wyndham earned his laurels in this field forty years ago.

A recent paperback collection, *The Best of John Wyndham*, which spans three decades, opens with *The Lost Machine*, his sole contribution to the original *Amazing*, in which a Martian robot comes to Earth. The visit had repercussions when the John Beynon novel, *Stowaway to Mars*, was published in 1936—as a serial in the weekly *Passing Show*, and in book form as *Planet Plane*.

The novel tells of the first interplanetary expedition, which discovers a dying race of Martians and the machines which are to succeed them. There were suitable revisions to both text and illustrations when the serial was presented a year later in a new popular science weekly, *Modern Wonder*, with the title changed to *The Space Machine*—and the girl stowaway, Joan, into a youth named John. The transformation has gone down as unique in the annals of science fiction.

Ten months before the British space-vessel *Gloria Mundi* took off for Mars, Beynon's earlier novel, *The Secret People*, had been serialised in *Passing Show* and published in hard covers prior to being featured by Toronto's *Star Weekly*. Set in the 1960s, it was primarily an adventure story about a lost race of pygmies inhabiting a cavern world beneath the Sahara, which had been flooded to form a New Sea. The serial presentation was enhanced by the classic illustrations of Fortunino Matania, who had already decorated three serials featuring American writers, including Edgar Rice Burroughs.

It was this unusual flourish of science fiction in an English periodical that encouraged Beynon to submit his work to *Passing Show*, which hailed him as 'the man who writes half a century ahead of all the others'. His success, he insisted, was entirely due to luck; yet, of the few British writers then specialising in science fiction, he alone was able to meet the demands of this new market—which did not stay open for long.

All these John Beynon stories have been given a new lease of life in their original form. Another recent collection features *Sleepers of Mars*, a sequel to *Stowaway* which follows the fortunes of the first Soviet expedition to the Red Planet. That the Russians might join in the race to annex a distant world was a common assumption, even then, but the notion had never before received serious treatment outside the USSR. It was a scoop which *Tales of Wonder* presented proudly in 1938.

As John Beynon—and once as Wyndham Parkes—Harris was also prominently featured in the short-lived British magazine *Fantasy*, along with his compatriots who had made their reputations in America. With these and other fellow spirits he compared notes at gatherings resulting from the formation of the British Interplanetary Society and the first Science Fiction Association, at which he was never to the fore, remaining a genial, unassuming onlooker.

For many years he was more actively connected with the Penn Club in Bloomsbury, where he lived and did most of his writing. During the war he served for three years as a censor until he found himself, at the age of 40, in the Royal Corps of Signals and finally on the Normandy beaches. During this time the name John Beynon appeared only once, in 1941, in the revamped *Amazing Stories*. But it was another ten years before John Wyndham arrived to put his predecessor in the shade.

What possessed him to change his pen-name, if it was anything more than a whim, has never been fully explained. Like many writers, he had gone through a period of post-war readjustment during which he produced little; though by the end of 1948 he had made his debut in *Collier's*, the American 'slick', with a fantasy story, *Jizzle*. He also made his first—and last—appearance in *Astounding Science Fiction*, while other magazines reprinted some of his earlier work, including *The Secret People*. And the brave venture which saved John Carnell's *New Worlds* from oblivion saw Harris in a new role as chairman of Nova Publications, a company financed by the readers and writers themselves—until more capital was needed.

The John Wyndham by-line first appeared in *Amazing*, on a story titled *The Eternal Eve*, in September 1950. By the following year the name had registered with thousands of readers who had followed the *Collier's* serial, *The Revolt of the Triffids*, or read the book version, *The Day of the Triffids*. Before the year ended it had been published here, and by 1952 was in an American paperback edition. By 1961 the Penguin paperback had sold 100,000 copies; now the whole world has been overrun.

As science fiction, the novel was not exceptional: seeds from space, malignant plants and the world at bay are all too familiar. Yet these simple elements were so skilfully mixed and the tale so logically unfolded that the average reader was enthralled, even if not all the critics were entirely impressed. 'An imaginative tale spoiled by too much moralising from a man and woman whom the author cannot make real', sniffed John Betjeman, loftily.

Another reviewer, misled by the by-line, thought 'he should go far now he has discovered the right genre for him to write in'. And Wyndham, who had laboured long over the novel, needed no more urging. His short stories soon began to appear frequently in the new magazines which had sprung up in America, and have continued to delight a widening audience ever since.

Some of these tales are closer to pure fantasy than science fiction, for it was on this type of story, as perfected by John Collier, that he had resolved to concentrate when he started writing again. But he could never discard the more orthodox concepts of science fiction, the fundamental Wellsian notions to which he tried to impart some of the grand master's touch to achieve 'a simple story, simply told, with an art which conceals art'. And more often than not he succeeded, particularly in his novels, which appeal to so many readers who are normally shy of science fiction.

Within two years of the Triffids invasion a short version of his second novel was being serialised in the British popular weekly, *Everybody's*, as *The Things from the Deep*. Almost simultaneously it appeared here in book form as *The Kraken Wakes*, and in America as *Out of the Deeps*. In this case the menacing aliens emerged from the sea; otherwise the story-line was much the same. But, again, the critics were satisfied—always excepting John Betjeman, who complained: 'When he is describing the inhuman Mr Wyndham is good. But heaven protect us from his human beings'.

In 1955 came *The Chrysalids*, in which Wyndham joined the dismal band of writers who portrayed the biological aftermath of atomic war, with its mutants and telepaths. Perhaps because of its morbid theme, it did not make an impact, though some consider it his best novel. But when, after two years, the new race of telepaths was born again in a present-day, rural setting as *The Midwich Cuckoos*, the little monsters proved so engaging that MGM featured them in the film, *Village of the Damned*, adding still more to Wyndham's sales.

A sequel, *Children of the Damned*, followed in 1963, when the Triffids also appeared on the cinema screen, but were hardly as terrifying; the technical problems involved in making them realistic were daunting. Both *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* were presented on BBC radio, and *Random Quest*, a tale of parallel worlds, was included in the television series, *Out of the Unknown*.

As though to prove that he had not entirely done with the interplanetary theme, in 1958 Wyndham contributed to *New Worlds* a series of novelettes dealing with the building of a space station and the exploration of the nearer planets. They also appeared in America before they were collected in a book titled *The Outward Urge* with the by-line 'John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes'. According to the blurb, Parkes had collaborated 'as technical adviser', but the device was hardly necessary to convince those who knew the author of *The Venus Adventure* which had been written thirty years before.

In 1960 he played with the idea of extending the human lifespan in *Trouble with Lichen*, a novel firmly based on Earth which poked fun at the Press and politics. It was Wyndham at his most Wellsian—and at his best; the sort of science fiction he most enjoyed writing. Eight years elapsed before he published his last novel, *Chocky*, in which he returned to the theme of the child possessed by an outside influence. An extension of a story which had appeared in *Amazing* in 1963, it was also dramatised on BBC radio.

It was not until he was sixty that John Wyndham married and moved into the country, where he died in 1969. Though his work never won any awards, it has drawn to science fiction many thousands of readers who must surely have enjoyed it however it was labelled.

The Stories of John Wyndham

These are given in chronological order, as published in the UK. Dates in brackets indicate publication in the USA. Paperback editions (pb) are listed only where they appeared under a different title or by-line.

Novels or connected stories:

1935: The Secret People (John Beynon). **1936:** Planet Plane (John Beynon). **(1951) 1951:** The Day of the Triffids. **(1952):** The revolt of the Triffids (pb). **1953:** The Kraken Wakes. **(1953):** Out of the Deeps (The Kraken Wakes). **1953:** Stowaway to Mars (Planet Plane) (John Beynon) (pb). **1955:** The Chrysalids. **(1955):** Re-Birth (The Chrysalids). **1957:** The Midwich Cuckoos. **(1957):** Village of the Damned (The Midwich Cuckoos). **1959:** The Outward Urge (John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes). **1960:** Trouble with Lichen. **(1964):** The Secret People (John Beynon Harris/John Wyndham) (pb). **1965:** The John Wyndham Omnibus*. **1968:** Chocky. **1972:** Stowaway to Mars (John Wyndham/John Beynon) (pb). **1972:** The Secret People (John Wyndham/John Beynon) (pb).

Short story collections:

1954: Jizzle. **1956:** The Seeds of Time. **(1956):** Tales of Gooseflesh and Laughter† (pb). **1961:** Consider Her Ways. **(1961):** The Infinite Moment (Consider Her Ways) (pb) .**1973:** Sleepers of Mars (John Wyndham/John Beynon Harris) (pb). **1973:** Wanderers of Time (John Wyndham/John Beynon Harris) (pb). **1973:** The Best of John Wyndham.

*Combines *The Day of the Triffids, The Kraken Wakes and The Chrysalids.*

†Comprises stories from *Jizzle* and *The Seeds of Time.*

THE PUFF-BALL MENACE

BY JOHN WYNDHAM

THE Prince Khordah of Ghangistan was in a bitter mood. His council, seated cross-legged upon a semi-circle of cushions before him, had come to know too well that look of dissatisfaction. Of late it had seemed to dwell perpetually upon his dark features. The members of the council were aware of his words before he spoke, so often had they heard them.

'To all great nations,' he observed, 'might is right. Today we hear much talk of the rights of small nations—and to what does it amount? Nothing but so much dust in the wind to fill the eyes of those who would see.'

He glowered upon his councillors. Each appeared occupied in an interested study of the mosaic floor; the beauty of its patterns was more soothing than the expression on the Prince's face. More than one grimy forefinger scratched in its owner's beard in order to give a misleading suggestion of thought.

The council was formed entirely of old men. Not that old men are always wise, but they do have the advantage of less fiery ambition, and, whether one is a Prince in Ghangistan, or a Big Shot in Chicago, too much ambition at court will prove embarrassing. The ambitions of most of the council rose little higher than a bountiful supply of food and drink and an occasional change of wives. The Prince continued to address unresponsive figures:

'What can we do? These English, and other foreigners, trifle with us. They do not so much as stir to consider our demands. We are treated like children—we, of Ghangistan, whose temples and palaces were weathered when these English hid in caves, whose ancestors reach back unbroken to the creation. We offer them war, and they laugh as one laughs at the ferocity of a cornered mouse. Here we must sit, impotent, while they pour over our country the froth and ferment of their way of life, in mockery of the wisdom of our sacred ancestors.'

Again the Prince paused and looked questioningly about him. At the lack of response he shrugged his shoulders; some of the spirit seemed to go out of him, and he threw out his hands in token of helplessness.

'And we can do nothing. We have no big guns, no aeroplanes. We must sit by and watch our ancient race seduced from its gods, and hear the voice of wisdom drowned by the sounding emptiness of materialism.'

He finished dejectedly. His anger had subsided beneath fatalism, and he brooded amid the respectful, if slightly bored silence of the council. One ancient looked up and studied the Prince. He allowed a decent interval to elapse before he inquired:

'Is it permitted to speak?'

The Prince regarded him with but little lifting of his despondency. 'It is permitted to you, Haramin,' he agreed.

The old man stroked his beard for some moments in placid reflection.

'It has seemed to me,' he began with slow deliberateness, 'that already we are more affected by the Westerners than we acknowledge. Even our methods of thought have become curiously coloured by their mental processes. We begin now to distort our pure wisdom to fit their strange conventions.'

A murmur of protest ran round the council, but none dare give full voice to his indignation, for the old man was privileged.

'Explain the full meaning,' commanded the Prince.

'It is well shown by an example, My Prince. See how these Westerners wage war. First they send

Chris Hamley

a declaration to warn their enemies—is this not absurd? Then they use against that enemy a series of weapons similar to his own—which is plainly ridiculous. They have, in fact, rules for war—a concept worthy only of children or imbeciles.

'We, in our wisdom, know better. We know that wars should be won or lost; not childishly prolonged until both sides give up for very weakness and weariness. And yet'—he paused and looked around him—'and yet we sit here lamenting our lack of weapons, lamenting that we cannot meet our oppressors on their own ground. It is a foolishness to consider the standards of the West in war.'

The Prince Khordah frowned. The tone of the other's speech displeased him, but he was aware that some deeper thought had prompted it. He asked coldly:

'Is it necessary here, Haramin, to lurk like an old fox in a thicket of words?'

'I have a nephew, Prince, a man of great learning in the ways of the West, yet retaining the wisdom of his ancestors. He has a plan which should interest Your Highness.'

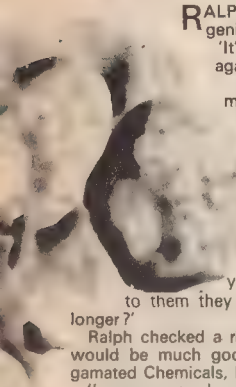
The Prince leaned forward. At last they seemed to be getting somewhere.

'Where is this nephew, Haramin?'

'I have brought him to await Your Highness' summons.'

The Prince struck a silver gong beside him. To the entering servant he said:

'The nephew of Haramin waits. Let him be brought before us.'



RALPH WAITE's father beamed genially across the dinner-table. 'It's good to have you home again, my boy,' he said. 'How long do you think you can manage?' Ralph, a lusty, fair-haired young man, turned towards him. 'Only the week-end, I'm afraid, Dad.'

Mrs Waite looked up with a little wrinkle of concern and disappointment.

'Is that all, dear? Don't you think if you wrote nicely to them they might *let you stay a little longer*?'

Ralph checked a rising smile. 'I don't think it would be much good writing nicely to Amalgamated Chemicals, Mother,' he said gravely.

'I suppose you know best, dear, but — '

Mr Waite broke in with some little excitement: 'I've got something to show you after dinner, Ralph. Quite the most remarkable thing in all my gardening experience.'

His eyes were on his plate, so that he missed the look with which his wife favoured him.

'But, dear,' she began, 'Ralph will want to — '

Ralph checked her with a glance. Of course he wanted to go and see Dorothy. His real desire was to rush off at this very moment, but he knew his father's enthusiasm for his hobby. The old man would be sadly disappointed if he could not impress his son with his latest horticultural triumph. After all, Ralph reflected, the old boy got little enough pleasure, pushed away in this little Cornish town for the rest of his life.

'What is it?' he asked.

Mr Waite chuckled. 'You'll see, my boy. All in good time; all in good time.'

The town of St Brian lies not far from the south coast of Cornwall. A swift river, the Bod, flows through it on its way to join the English Channel at a point where it is almost the Atlantic Ocean. To the north one can see those strange, dazzling white cones which are the refuse of the clay pits, and from the higher points it is possible to trace the course of the Bod right down to the sea in the south.

The houses are mostly built of grey stone, their roofs clamped down upon them lest they should be whirled off by the gales which in winter sweep in from the Atlantic. In sheltered spots, where they are able to take advantage of kindly climate, flowers and plants thrive, as was excellently testified by Mr Waite's garden.

Dinner concluded, he led the way importantly across a stretch of smooth lawn to the thick hedge masking the far corner of his ground. As they reached a gap he paused, and with something of the manner of a showman, waved his son forward.

'There, my boy,' he said proudly. 'Just take a look at that!'

Ralph, as he stepped forward to the hedge, was fully prepared to be impressed, but at the sight which met him, the nicely turned phrases he had thought up for the other's gratification fled away. He stared speechlessly for a moment, then:

'What on earth's that?' he demanded.

'Ah, I thought it'd surprise you. Fine growth, what?'

'But—what *is* the thing?' persisted Ralph, gazing in horrified fascination.

'Well,' Mr Waite admitted doubtfully, 'I don't think it's been named yet—sort of experiment they got me to try out. A new form of marrow or something of the sort, I gather. Wait a minute, and I'll get the letter . . . '

He bustled across the lawn while his son turned to regard the 'fine growth' with renewed interest. Experiment or not, he decided that it was quite one of the most unwholesome looking plants he had ever seen. Roughly spherical, it reminded him mostly of a pumpkin with a diameter every bit of two feet.

But it was not so much the size which was responsible for his surprise as the colour. It lay before him, clammily glistening in the evening sunlight, a ball of blotchy, virulent yellow. The ground all round it was bare, and it lay on one side attached to the earth only by a poor, twisted wisp of stalk, as foolishly disproportionate as a pig's tail.

'Must be a good weight, a thing that size,' he muttered to himself. With some distaste, he inserted his hand beneath it, and then stared at the thing in blank surprise. It weighed possibly a pound.

He was still staring at it when Mr Waite returned with a paper fluttering in his hand.

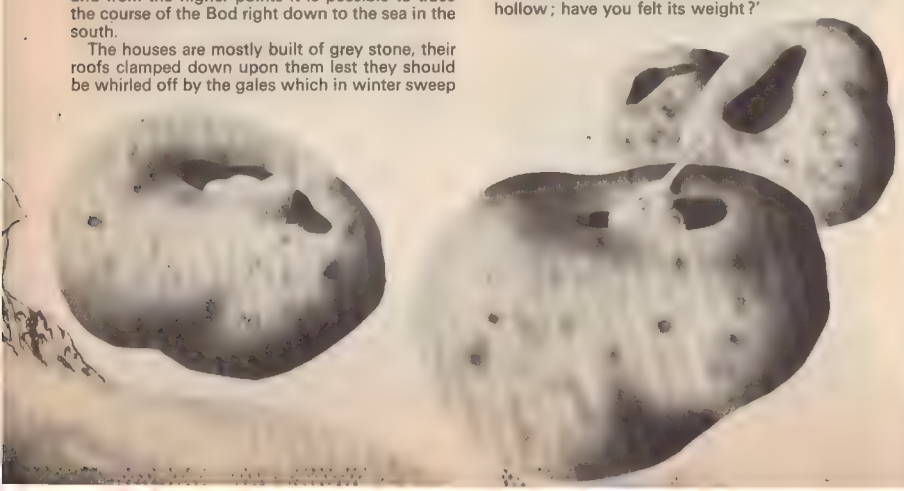
'Here you are. That, and the instructions for growing, are all I know about it.'

Ralph took the typewritten letter. It was headed 'Slowitt & Co.', and underneath in smaller type was added: 'Agents for Experimental Growers' Company.'

> Dear Sir (he read), In the course of our experimental work we have succeeded in evolving a new form of vegetable. We have the greatest hopes that this extremely prolific plant will successfully adapt itself to a great range of climatic conditions. In so far as we have been able to reproduce the various conditions in our laboratories, the results leave nothing to be desired, and we now feel that the time has come to put the plant to test in the actual climates it will have to face.
>
> Our agents, in pursuance of our instructions to find persons likely to be interested in this development, forwarded us your name as that of a consistently successful exhibitor at a number of fruit and vegetable shows, and as one who takes an interest in the scientific side of horticulture. We have, therefore, great pleasure in asking you if you would consider assisting us in the introduction of this new form . . .

Ralph read far enough to enable him to grasp essentials.

'This is all very well, Dad,' he remarked. 'But what on earth's the good of the thing? It must be hollow; have you felt its weight?'



'Oh, that's all right. It says in the growing instructions, which they sent with the seeds, that one must not be surprised at the extraordinary lightness. I gather that when it is full-grown it begins to solidify or harden. Though it is a queer looking thing, I'll admit, and so were the seeds.'

He fished in his pocket and found an object which he handed over.

'I kept this one out of curiosity. You see, they've enclosed it—or, rather, several of them—in a kind of capsule. The instructions were emphatic that the capsule must not be opened in any circumstances.'

'Then how — ?'

'You just bury the whole thing and water it very plentifully; I suppose that dissolves the capsule and lets the thing begin to grow. It certainly shows a fine turn of speed. You'd never guess how long it is since I planted this chap.' He stirred the yellow ball with his toe.

Ralph did not attempt the guess. 'How long?' he inquired.

'Three days,' said his father with pride. 'Only three days to reach that size! Of course, I'm not sure how long it will be before it's any use, but it's started very well, and — '

But Mr Waite's intended lecture was frustrated. His wife's voice tactfully summoned him to the house.

'Don't tell anyone about this, yet, my boy. I promised to keep it quiet till the thing should be full-grown,' he said as he hurried across the lawn.

Ralph thankfully departed on his intended visit. Later, he was unable to remember whether it was curiosity or absence of mind which caused the one remaining seed capsule to find its way into his pocket; he only knew that it was lucky he had kept it.

Dorothy Forbes had expected Ralph earlier. She had even employed sundry of her waiting moments in inventing such reproaches as might be becoming in a lady slightly neglected. It was a pleasant mental exercise, but little more; Ralph's method of greeting did not allow of the interview being placed on a dignified basis.

Instead of venting her displeasure, she smoothed her frock, shook back her fair hair, wondered for a moment why one should blush quite so warmly, and suggested that there was a swing seat in the garden.

The swing seat was such a success that it was quite half an hour before an object on the other side of the garden caught Ralph's eye and caused him to sit up, staring. Just visible over the top of a cucumber frame was a curved section of a familiar yellow surface.

'Good Lord!' he said.

'What?' asked Dorothy. Following his line of sight, she added: 'Oh, that's one of Daddy's secrets—you're not supposed to see it.'

'Well, now I have seen it, what about a closer view?'

'I suppose it doesn't really matter, but don't tell him you've seen it.'

A few seconds sufficed to settle any lingering doubt. The plant behind the frame was identical with that in his father's garden, though possibly a few inches smaller.

'That's queer.' Ralph murmured.

Dorothy nodded, though she misapplied the remark.

'I think it's horrid. I told Daddy I'm sure it's unhealthy, but he only laughed at me. Somehow I hate the thing. There's such a nasty, poisonous look about that yellow.'

'He's keeping it secret?'

'Yes; he's very jealous about it. He says it will make him famous one day.'

Ralph nodded. This made it queerer still. He considered for a moment. Two people, each thinking himself unique, were growing this most unprepossessing vegetable.

'What about a little walk?' he suggested. Dorothy, with slight surprise at the sudden change of subject, assented.

It was a wandering stroll, apparently aimless. Nevertheless it took them close to a number of back gardens. Altogether, they counted over twenty of the strange yellow balls.

WHEN Ralph returned home to London, it was obvious that in a very short time there would be no more concealment of the strange growths. They were swelling to prodigious sizes with a swiftness which was rendering secrecy impossible. Already two peppery gentlemen who had considered themselves favoured experimenters had discovered one another's rivalry and were indulging in wordy unpleasantness.

It could not be long before all twenty, and other yet undiscovered growers, would hear about it and join in the indignation. Dorothy's next letter, therefore, did not astonish him when it announced that the cats were out of the bag and the gardeners

of the town of St Brian were in full cry for one another's blood.

'When our fathers discovered that they were rivals,' she wrote, 'it was bad enough. But now there are more than a score of them tearing their hair and threatening legal proceedings. It isn't only in St Brian, either. We've heard reports that hundreds of gardeners both in Cornwall and west Devon are growing the things.

'Ours is so big, too. It's over four feet in diameter now, and looks more evil than ever. I'm beginning to feel a bit afraid of it; I know that sounds silly, but it's the truth. I told Daddy the other day that there was something wicked about it and that I was sure it was never meant to grow in England, but he only laughed and said neither were potatoes. All the same, I think the balls are beastly things. I hear that some boys cut the stalk of one near Newquay and rolled it down the cliffs so that it burst. I'd like to do the same with ours, only I hate the idea of touching the thing—ugh!'

The earlier part of the letter caused Ralph some quiet smiles. He knew very well the temperament of the amateur gardener, with all its jealousies and enthusiasms, and the prospect of the warfare which must now be disturbing the community could give the unprejudiced onlooker no little amusement. But he grew more serious as he recalled the sickening appearance of those growths when they were only two feet in diameter; already they had swelled to four . . .

Unreasoning as Dorothy's dislike of them might be, he found himself able to understand it and to sympathise with it. He was worried by the feeling, for he preferred reason to prejudice.

Nevertheless the matter was gradually slipping into the back of his mind until it was recalled a few days later by a paragraph tucked away at the foot of a newspaper column:

> 'Several cases are reported from Newquay, the well-known Cornish holiday resort, of an outbreak of rash which is puzzling the local doctors. It is thought that the condition may be consequent upon prolonged or injudicious exposure of the skin while sunbathing.'

For a moment he was puzzled to know when he had lately thought of Newquay; then he remembered that it was near there that the yellow ball had been pushed over the cliffs.

Dorothy's next letter informed him that a state of excitement was prevailing all over the West Country. The inhabitants, it appeared, had split into two schools of thought on the subject of the yellow balls.

The growers and their friends were noisily upholding their rights to grow what they liked on their own land, while the opposition, without apparent grounds for the statement, proclaimed that the things were unhealthy. They shared, Dorothy surmised, her revulsion against them. Some days before a minor riot of protest had taken place in Bodmin. In the course of it, three balls had been slashed open.

After he had finished the letter, Ralph turned to his newspaper and found information which brought wrinkles of speculation to his forehead.

The cases of rash at Newquay had become serious. One of the victims had died, and the others were in a precarious condition. It was, according to the correspondent, impossible to state definitely that the rash was the cause of death, but he evidently had more than suspicions.

Then followed the information that the same mysterious rash had made its appearance at Bodmin, coupled with an assurance that it could not, in the later cases, be in any way attributed to sunbathing.

Thoughtfully, Ralph withdrew his father's seed capsule from his pocket and regarded it.

'I may be a fool. It's probably just a coincidence, but it's worth investigating,' he told himself.

Before he sought his own office, he called in at the laboratory of a friend who worked in the bio-chemical department of Amalgamated Chemicals Ltd.

Two days passed before he heard any result of the examination of the capsule. Then Arnold Jordan, the bio-chemist, entered his office just as he was finishing off for the day.

'You've tackled it?' asked Ralph.

Arnold nodded.

'Yes, I've tackled it. And I'm not sure whether I owe you a dinner for putting me on to it, or whether you owe me a dinner for putting in the devil of a lot of work. On the whole, I approve of the latter.'

'Oh, all right. You look as if some good food wouldn't do you any harm. Come on!'

It was not until the end of the dinner, over the coffee and cigarettes, that Arnold consented to discuss his conclusions. Then he began with an expostulation.

'I do think, old man, you might have given me a bit more warning about that beastly stuff you brought along.'

'Well, I told you I had an idea it was pretty noxious,' Ralph pointed out. 'But, after all, the reason I brought it at all was that I didn't know much about it.'

'Where did you get it?' asked Arnold curiously.

His manner shed its slight banter, and a look of seriousness crept into his eyes, as Ralph explained.

'Good God! You don't mean to say these things are being grown! What for?'

'Food—what else does one grow vegetables for?'

'But this is a fungus.'

'I thought it looked that way, but quite a lot of fungi are edible when they're cooked.'

Arnold failed to reply for some seconds; he seemed not to have heard and was staring fixedly into space. When he turned back Ralph was startled by the expression on his face.

'Do you know anything about fungi?'

'No,' replied Ralph promptly.

'Well, I'll be short about it, but I'll try to show you what this business means. First of all, there are two types of fungi. Either a fungus is a saprophyte and lives upon decaying matter, or else it is a parasite, in which case it exists upon living matter. As far as the saprophytes are concerned—well, you've eaten a good many in your time as mushrooms or cheese, or a hundred other ways; but the parasites are not so numerous—the kind which most frequently afflicts human beings is ringworm.

'Now this particular bit of evil which you kindly handed to me is neither one nor other of these forms; it is both. That is to say that it flourishes equally well on decay, or on living flesh. Do you

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see what I'm getting at?'

Ralph began to see.

'This thing,' Arnold continued, 'is not only a parasite, but a more vicious parasite than any known. All these growths you have told me of must be scotched—utterly wiped out and obliterated before they can become ripe. Once allowed to burst and scatter their spores—' He spread his hands expressively.

Ralph regarded him nervously. 'You're sure of this?'

Arnold nodded. 'Of the danger I am certain. About the plant itself I'm very puzzled. Obviously the spores were enclosed in a soluble capsule so that they might be planted and brought to fruit in safety.

'If your information is correct, the whole thing seems to be deliberate, and on a large scale. It is not merely a case of scattering a few spores to grow haphazard, but immense trouble has been taken to induce people to cultivate the fungi so that millions of spores will be spread.'

He paused, and added: 'It's up to us to try to stop this thing, old man. Somebody must, or it's God help thousands of miserable people!'

Ralph was silent. He remembered the mysterious rash at Newquay, and the similar outbreak at Bodmin. He recalled, too, the sight of that slimy, yellow ball in his father's garden, and his face was pale as he looked at the other.

'We're too late,' he said. 'It's begun.'

'STUFF!' said Major Forbes, with some violence. 'Stuff and nonsense! You ought to have known better, young man, than to come to me with an old wives tale like that.'

Ralph gave up his attempt to convince the old man. After Arnold's warning of the previous evening, he had caught the earliest possible train for the West Country and travelled all night. There had not been any time to lose. So far as he knew, the enormous puffballs might burst of their own accord at any hour, quite apart from the danger of one of them receiving an accidental puncture and spreading its spores about the neighbourhood.

He had arrived, tired and anxious, to be greeted by both his own and Dorothy's father with complete disbelief. In vain he put the cases of rash forward as evidence and quoted Arnold's warning. It was useless. Each, at the back of his mind, seemed determined that this was some deep ruse by rival growers to get him out of the way; and, even if the thing was a fungus, what man worth his salt was going to be scared by a mere puff-ball, however big?

'No,' Major Forbes repeated firmly. 'You say that your mother and my daughter are willing to leave—of course they are. Women are always wanting to run up to London for some fal-lal or other. Take 'em along with you; the change'll do 'em good. But don't come bothering me!'

And there was a similar interview with his own father. Mrs Waite attempted to smooth over her husband's irritation.

'Now, don't worry your father any more, dear. You must see that he doesn't want to come. I should like to go to London for a week or so, but don't bother him. I should have to go soon, in any case, to do a little shopping.'

'But you don't understand, Mother. This is really serious—it's dangerous. These things he is growing are rank poison!'

Mrs Waite looked a little distressed.

'Do you really think so, dear? I mean, it seems so unlikely—and the people who sent them don't seem to think so. They definitely said they were vegetables.'

'Never mind what they said. Take it from me—or, rather, from Arnold, who is an expert—that these things are deadly and must be destroyed.'

'Eh? What's that?' Mr Waite chimed in. 'Destroyed? I'd like to see anyone attempt to destroy my specimen. I'd show him what's what! There's still a law in the land.'

'You'll promise me, won't you, John, not to eat any of it while I am away?' Mrs Waite spoke as though her presence should nullify the plant's poisonous quality. Her husband ungraciously conceded the point.

'All right,' he said gruffly. 'I'll promise you that much—though I repeat that I think the whole thing is a scare.'

'Well, if you won't come, I can't make you,' said Ralph, 'but I do beg of you—'

Again he went over the details of Arnold's warning, only to succeed in thinning his father's temper and his own. At last he turned to Mrs Waite.

'This is a waste of time. You'd better pack your things and get ready, Mother.'

'You mean now, dear?'

'Yes. At once.'

'Oh, but I couldn't possibly be ready before tomorrow. There are such a lot of things which just have to be finished off.'

Ralph went around again to see Dorothy.

'We'll have to wait until tomorrow,' he told her. 'I can't make them believe there's any danger in delay.'

'Well, one day won't make much difference,' she suggested.

'It might. I want to get you both out of here as soon as possible. Any moment it may be too late.'

'We'll be right away this time tomorrow. Now let's talk about something else.'

'I can't think of anything else. I've heard Arnold on the subject, and you haven't. Let's go out and have a look at the brutes.'

'Hullo,' said Arnold, entering Ralph's office. 'Where the devil have you been for the last two days?'

'Down in Cornwall; trying to make my people clear out.'

'Did you?'

'Got Dorothy and my mother up here. Neither of the fathers would shift—stubborn old fools! What have you been up to?'

Arnold disregarded the question. 'You've done all you could?'

'Of course I have—short of kidnapping the old blighters.'

Arnold looked grave.

'I'm afraid the news is rather serious,' he began. 'The morning after our chat I went round to see a fellow I know at the Ministry of Health, and they welcomed me there with open arms. This thing is a good many times bigger than we thought it was. The authorities have been minimising—didn't want to ruin the holiday traffic, or some rot like that. They told me that there have been

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DAWN OF THE GOLDEN AGE. Painting by Bob Layzell

Continued from page 12

hundreds of cases of the rash and several dozen deaths. Not only that, but soon after the dead have been buried those yellow puff-balls start growing from the graves'.

'Their experts were as sure as I was that this form of fungus has never been heard of before, and most of us are pretty certain that somebody has been up to some rather ugly cross-breeding, with malice aforethought. They issued orders yesterday that no more of the things were to be planted, but that was useless; already round the centres where the things have burst, the place is littered with the balls.'

'Growing already?'

'Thousands of them, around Newquay and Bodmin and several other places. And nobody dare touch them.'

'But aren't they doing anything—destroying them?'

'How?'

'Can't they—can't they spray them with acids, or something? Do you realise that the first lot hasn't reached its natural bursting point yet? All this second crop is the result of accidental breakage. God knows what will happen if they are allowed to burst.'

'Nobody seems to know how to tackle the situation. But they're not lying down; they see the danger all right, and they're going after it day and night. You can see yourself that the problem is how to destroy the balls without liberating the spores.'

'There must be some way . . . '

'Oh, they'll find a way, but it's got to be drastic and well organised. The thing they're most anxious about at present is that there shall be no panic. You know what people are like when they lose their heads. If they go wild and start smashing the things wholesale, there'll be hell to pay. You can take it from me that the departments concerned are already making things hum behind the scenes.'

'Meanwhile, the first crop of balls must be pretty nearly ripe . . . '

Ralph searched the lounge of the hotel where his mother and Dorothy were staying. He eventually found Mrs Waite occupying a comfortable armchair in a secluded corner. He greeted her, and seated himself beside her.

'Where's Dorothy?' he asked a few minutes later. 'Getting ready?'

'Ready?' repeated Mrs Waite inquiringly.

'We arranged to go out and dance this evening.'

'Oh, dear me, of course. Then you didn't hear from her—she said she would telephone.'

'She didn't. What was it about?'

'Well, she won't be able to go out tonight. You see, she's gone down to Cornwall.'

'She's what?' shouted Ralph, in a voice which echoed across the lounge.

'Yes, dear, she said she felt she must go to Cornwall,' Mrs Waite repeated placidly.

'But why didn't you stop her? Surely you realise the danger? Good God, she may have caught the rash—she may die of it.'

Mrs Waite looked a little shocked.

'Well, dear, I did tell her that I didn't think you would like it. But she seemed so anxious about her father—such a nice trait in a young girl, I always think—that I didn't feel it was right to interfere.'

Ralph made no reply. His mother, glancing at him, saw that his face was drawn into tight creases. There was an expression in his eyes which hurt her. For the first time she began to appreciate that there was real fear behind his actions and talk of the last few days. Futilely she started to talk when she should have kept silent.

'Of course, this may not be so very dangerous after all. I expect it's just another of these scares. Things will be all right in the end, and we shall all have a good laugh at our fears. Don't you worry, dear; I expect—good gracious!'

Ralph was roused out of his thoughts to see what had caused her exclamation of surprise. He looked up to find himself facing his father and Major Forbes. An hour ago he would have been pleased to see them and cheered by the thought that the whole party was reunited; but now his greeting was cold.

Major Forbes looked around him.

'And where is Dorothy?' he asked.

Ralph answered him bitterly.

'She's gone to save you,' he said.

'YES, my boy,' said Mr Waite, 'we certainly owe our escape to you. You seemed so positive about the danger that I did a bit of investigating; poked about a bit among the local officials.

'It was old Inspector Roberts who gave me the tip—he's always considered himself in my debt over that matter of his boy. "Mr Waite," he said, "I ought not to tell you; in fact, I'm breaking orders by doing so, but if you take my advice you'll get out of the district just as soon as you can." '

'Yes, it was a straight tip, by gad!' agreed the Major. 'I managed to hear a few things about the country round about—pretty bad. Some fool started a panic in Launceston. Half the town was out with sticks and stones and knives, smashing all the yellow balls they could find.

'A man told me the ground was white with spores, as if there had been a snowstorm. Some of the growers tried to interfere, and there was something like a battle. Pretty much the same thing seems to have happened in Tavistock and other places in west Devon.'

Ralph looked up.

'Spores or riots,' he said, 'I'm going down by the midnight train to get Dorothy out of that. What's the time now?'

The Major snorted,

'Don't be a fool, young man! The girl's all right. She'll be back any moment now, I'll warrant. They're not allowing anyone to enter the area now, so she'll *have* to come back. Your father and I came out on one of the last trains allowed through.'

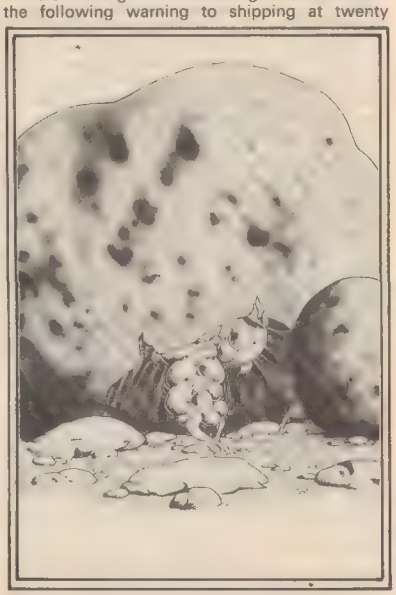
'What's the time?' Ralph demanded again.

'Twenty to ten,' said the Major, 'and I repeat that you are wasting your time if you go down there.'

'The news,' Mr Waite said suddenly. 'There's sure to be something about all this.' He called a waiter and asked for the radio to be switched on. A few moments later they were listening to the calm, familiar voice of the London announcer.

The general weather report was unencouraging and the voice went on to add:

'Gale warning. The Meteorological Office issued the following warning to shipping at twenty



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hours, Greenwich Mean Time. Strong westerly winds, rising to gale force, may be expected on all the Irish coast. English coast west of a line from Southampton to Newcastle, and English Channel.'

Ralph glanced at his father, who caught his eye, but sent a warning glance in the direction of his mother. Both of them grasped the implication. Thousands of light, yellow balls attached merely by skimpy stalks—and a gale rising. . . .

The announcer began on the news:

'We are asked by the Ministry of Transport to broadcast the following. Suspension of service. All train services between Exeter and points west thereof have been temporarily suspended. Further details will be announced tomorrow.'

The Major looked at Ralph triumphantly.

'I told you so! They're isolating the whole district. There's no point in your going down. We shall have Dorothy back here in no time.'

But Ralph was unconvinced. Dorothy had set out to get to her home, and he had a horrid fear that she would do it if it were humanely possible. The Major did not seem to know his own daughter's tenacity of purpose. Ralph stood up with determination.

'I'm going down there *now*. There are still cars, even if they have stopped the trains.'

Thump . . . thump . . . thump . . . went Ralph's mallet. It was three days since he had left London, and now he was engaged in driving stakes into the hard soil of Dartmoor.

A message earlier in the day had informed him that no news had been received of Dorothy. There could be no doubt that she had been trapped in the isolated area and was now—if she had succeeded in reaching St Brian—still forty or fifty miles to the west of him. He reflected angrily on the events which had landed him at his present occupation.

He had rushed from the hotel in search of Arnold. Before midnight he had borrowed the others' car and was running down Piccadilly, in company with the taxis of homeward-bound theatre-goers. The traffic grew faster and sparser as he passed through sprawling suburbs. He looked forward to showing a good turn of speed on the Great West Road. But when he reached it the volume of traffic had undeniably increased once more.

Long lines of trucks, not too punctilious about keeping to the side of the road, stretched before him. A constant flow of private cars against him, unprecedented for the time of night, made it a difficult business to overtake the trucks. Ralph cursed the obstruction of the lumbering line and noticed for the first time that they were not commercial vans, but were painted khaki or grey, with Army markings on their sides. He swore again. A piece of foul luck to get mixed up in Army manoeuvres; but perhaps they would drop off at Aldershot. They did not. They held on the road to the west and, to his exasperation, were augmented by hundreds more.

'Anybody would think,' he muttered to himself, 'that there was a war on. The whole blooming Army seems to be going my way!'

To add to his troubles, the wind was rising, bringing with it sharp flurries of rain. Instead of making a dash through the night as he had intended, his speed was reduced to a crawl. Only infrequently did the traffic against him allow him to cut past a few of the lumbering shapes ahead. It was full daylight long before he reached Exeter, and he passed through the narrow streets of the old city still escorted by the Army wagons.

Two miles beyond, the road was blocked by a barricade. Sentries with fixed bayonets were assisting the police to turn back all private cars. The representatives of both forces were equally unmoved by his offers of money or his loss of temper.

'It's no good makin' a fuss, young feller,' advised a police sergeant. 'If I'd been taking money today, I could have made my fortune and retired on it. You get back 'ome now!'

There had been nothing for it but to turn his car round and drive sullenly back to Exeter. There he munched a necessary, though unappreciated, meal while he decided on the next move.

'No private cars along 'ere.' the policeman had said. But the trucks were going through—those same damned trucks which had hindered him all night. Hundreds of them. They were passed without question, and, moreover, without a search. It ought to be possible to jump one and stow away. . . .

After a number of uncomfortable miles the truck stopped. The tail-board was lowered.

' 'Ere, you, come along out of it,' demanded a voice. A hand fastened firmly on to Ralph's collar and dragged him painfully from his hiding-place amid wooden stakes and rolls of barbed wire. He landed among a group of men under the command of a sergeant. The latter came close to him, his pointed moustaches adding ferocity, to his expression as he shouted:

'What the — blazes do you think you were doing in that — lorry? You come along 'ere with me.'

The officer to whom he was taken had heard him out and then regarded him seriously.

'I like your spirit,' he said, 'but just listen to me a minute. You seem to know something of the situation, but you're tackling it the wrong way. It's no good your going over there.' He waved his hand to the west. 'You couldn't do a damned thing if you got through, except make yourself another victim.'

'Your girl doesn't want you to die. You know, if you give it a moment's thought, that she'd be far prouder of you for helping to fight this stuff and beat it; for helping to blot the damned growths out and make thousands of people safe.'

'But she's — !'

'And don't you realise that from the body of every man who dies out there, more of the yellow balls grow? If you go out there, you'll not only be helpless, but you'll be giving your body to feed them. No, my lad, your job is to help us to fight against the menace. This is a state of emergency, and we need all the help we can get. What about it?'

Ralph at length consented, though with not too good a grace. He knew the officer was right. It was his job to fight, not to throw his life away, but . . . He did not quite trust himself. Sometime the urge to find Dorothy might prove too strong for him. . . .

His working partner's voice broke in on his thoughts. 'What d'yer say to a cigarette, mate?'

Ralph delivered a final blow to the stake they were fixing, and agreed. To right and left of them across the moorland hills stretched the long line

of posts. Here and there, parties of men who had completed their sections were already beginning to weave an impenetrable net of barbed wire around the stakes. Behind, on the roadway, was a never-ending line of trucks loaded with more wire and yet more stakes, while closer, between themselves and the road, a sweating army of men laboured to dig a broad trench.

Ralph was amazed at the organisation which in two or three days had enabled the authorities to be well on the way to barricading off a whole corner of the country. At the same time he was puzzled; the purpose of the wire was obvious, but he failed to understand the reason for the broad, shallow trench. Nor was his partner, Bill 'Awkins, as he called himself, able to explain its use. But he was ready to concede that the authorities knew what they were about, and were not wasting any time.

'Yus,' he remarked, 'they're quick on the job, they are. Why, a few nights ago there was a gale warning—p'raps you 'eard it?'

Ralph nodded.

'Well, the minute they knew that, they changed their plans like a flash. This 'ere line was to 'ave been miles farther forward; they'd even begun to get the supplies up there when the order for retreat came. You see, the wind in these parts is pretty near always from the west, that's what's got 'em scared—the idea of this stuff being swept right across the country. If it's true what they say about some feller a-startin' it on purpose, then 'e picked a likely place.

' 'Owever, the wind didn't come to much, after all. Most of them yeller balls just rolled a bit, and then got stuck in the valleys and 'ollows and suchlike—blamed lucky it was, too.'

'Then all this,' said Ralph, indicating the defences, 'is in case a real storm comes along?'

'That'll be about the idea,' Bill agreed.

They smoked for a while in silence. From time to time a great plane would roar across the moor, carrying food supplies to be dropped to the isolated; and, once, a large caterpillar tractor came swaying and plunging past them, bound for the west. Bill grinned as he caught sight of the men aboard it and the instruments they held.

'What are they?' asked Ralph. 'Looks like a squad of divers going on duty.'

'Asbestos suits and masks,' the other explained. 'And they're carrying flame-throwers. Those'll give the blinkin' things a bit of a toasting!'

SOME six nights later, Ralph sat with a group in the stable which was their billet. One man was holding forth pessimistically.

'I suppose they're doing a bit of good with all this flame-throwing and whatnot, but it ain't getting 'em far. It's the plant underneath that they want to get at, not just the yellow balls. They're only the fruit—you don't kill an apple-tree by knocking off the apples. Fungi have a sort of web of stuff spreading all through the ground around them; that's the life of the things, and that's what they — '

There came a thunderous knocking on the door and a stentorian call to turn out.

'Wind's rising,' said the sergeant. 'You all know your jobs. Get to 'em, and look slippy!'

The wind swept in from the Atlantic at gale force. The first few puffs stirred the yellow balls and rolled them a little at the ends of their skimpy stalks. Later followed a gust which twisted them so that the stalks snapped and they were free to roll where the wind urged. As the pressure grew to a steady blast, it swept up a mass of the light balls and carried them bounding across the countryside, an army of vegetable invaders launching their attack to capture the land and destroy human beings.

The wind of a week before had moved only the balls in the most exposed positions, but this time, none but the youngest and least developed had the strength in their stalks to resist the air which tore at them. Every now and then a splashing flurry of white would spring from the hurtling, bounding horde as the tough, yellow skin of one was ripped by some sharp spike or the corner of a roof. Then the great spores themselves were caught up by the wind and carried on faster as an advance guard of the yellow army.

The gale seemed to display a diabolical zest for this new game. It increased its force to drive the balls yet more furiously. Hedges, ditches and trees failed to check the headlong charge. Even rivers proved no obstacle; with the wind behind, the balls sailed across in their thousands, bobbing and jerking on the rough surface.

They were thrust relentlessly down the narrow streets of the little towns, jostling and jamming against the corners of the buildings until the houses were hidden in a cloud of swirling spores, and the surviving balls tore loose to follow bowling in the wake of their fellows.

This time, the wind did not desert them. Many lodged in sheltered hollows, but they served merely to fill them up and make a path over which the rest could travel. The wave of invaders climbed the slopes and swept up and out on to the moor, where, unobstructed, they gathered speed to charge yet more swiftly upon the defenders.

There was a line of fire across the country. Ralph had soon learned the purpose of the broad trench. Filled now with blazing oil and wood, it formed a rampart of flame.

'Here they come,' cried the look-out, clinging to a swaying perch high above.

Soon all could see the few whirling balls which seemed to lead the way, and the turgid mass of yellow pressing close behind the outrunners.

They held their breaths. . . .

The first balls hurled themselves to destruction upon a *cheval-de-frise*, a hedge of bristling spikes which slit and tore their skins and set free the spores to go scudding on into the flames. But they came too thick and fast. In many places they piled up solid against the sharp fence, forming ramps for those behind to come racing over the top and fall among the meshes of barbed wire.

Every now and then a ball seemed to leap as though it possessed motive power within itself. Missing the wire, it would bowl across no-man's land to a final explosion in the flaming ditch, its burning spores shooting aloft like the discharge of a monstrous firework.

'My God!' muttered the man next to Ralph. 'If this wind doesn't drop soon, we'll be done. Look at that!'

'That' was one of several balls which, miraculously escaping all traps prepared for it, had leaped past them into the darkness behind.

'They'll catch it in the nets back there and burn it when the wind drops,' Ralph replied with a confidence which he scarcely felt. 'The thing that worries me is that the fires may die down—we can't get near to fuel them from the lee side here.'

But, as luck had it, the fires outlasted the wind.

'Men,' began the officer in charge, the next morning, 'it was a pretty near thing last night, and we have to thank providence that we successfully withstood it. But we can't afford to waste time. We've got to get to work at once. There may be another wind any time, and that mass of stuff choking the spikes must be cleared before it comes. I want every man who has experience of flame-throwers to step forward.'

Ralph, in company with many others, stepped out. He had no knowledge of flame-throwers, but it was the only way he could acquire an asbestos suit and get out into the danger area. For more than a week he had stifled his anxiety to know Dorothy's fate, and now he could bear it no longer.

As he struggled into the heavy covering which would not only insulate him from the fire, but also withstand the deadly spores, he turned over his plan. Perhaps such a simple getaway was unworthy of the name of a plan. Roughly, it consisted in placing himself among the foremost of those who would be clearing the ground with their fire-sprays, and working gradually ahead until the thickly scattered balls should give him concealment from the rest of the party. All he had to do then was to walk off to the west.

The only risk, once he was away, was that one of the food-carrying planes might spot him. But the chance was remote, and it was unlikely that a lone straggler would be considered worthy of investigation.

The scheme worked as he had expected. No hue and cry was raised after him as he wormed away. In a very little while he stood alone at the threshold of the stricken district.

As far as he could see in three directions, the land was dotted with the yellow balls, poised ominously where the wind had left them, and seeming to wait for the next gale to pick them up and send them swirling onward to more victims. Surrounded by the evilly glittering skins, he shuddered for a moment before his determination reasserted itself.

He drew a deep breath through his mask, threw back his head and strode on, a lone, grey figure, the only moving object in a scene of desolation.

In the first village he found a motor-cycle with its tank half-full, and for six miles it shattered the silence of the moor as he drove it, zigzagging to avoid the growths which littered the road. Then came a sharp valley so choked with balls that he must leave the motor-cycle, throw away the heavy flame-thrower and climb across the balls themselves.

On several occasions one burst beneath his weight and he dropped some feet in a flurry of spores which threatened to choke his breathing mask until he could wipe them away. Then, laboriously, he must pick himself up and struggle on, while streams of sweat soaked his clothing beneath the clumsy suit. Once he almost turned back to pick up the flame-thrower with the idea of burning his way through the mass, but he remembered that its cylinder was already half discharged. Desperately he battled, until at last his feet found the bracken and heather of the farther hill-side.

Afterwards, he could recall little of that journey. He became uncertain even of the number of days which passed as he tramped on and scrambled through one choked valley after another.

Only odd incidents startled him now and then out of a stupid weariness: the little town on the moor where men and women lay dead in the streets while the fungus preyed on them, and the windows of the houses were full of yellow balls which mercifully hid the rooms . . . the voice of a madman chanting hymns in a barricaded hut; hymns which turned to cursing blasphemies as he heard Ralph's step outside . . . the things which had been men, and which he was forced to move when thirst tortured him to find a drink in a dead inn. . . .

But somehow, with dulled senses, he strove on through the nightmare while with every mile he covered, the fear of what he might find at his goal increased.

He felt that he was almost home when he crossed the River Tamar which separates Devon from Cornwall. The bridge was choked with the fungus. Upstream was wedged a solid mass of yellow, but below it the river raced, bearing an occasional serenely floating ball which would later meet its fate before the fire boats in Plymouth Sound.

At last, St Brian. The balls were fewer here. The wind had carried most of them away. His own home. Farther on, Dorothy's home—blank, locked . . . deserted?

He broke a window to enter, and wandered about the empty rooms. No trace of fungus inside the house. No trace, either, of Dorothy. Perhaps she was upstairs. He was weak and hungry. Every step of the climb was an effort.

At the door of her room he hesitated. Would she be there; the yellow balls growing from her, feeding upon her still body? He opened the door; anything was better now than uncertainty. No one on the bed—no one in the room at all. He began to laugh hysterically. Dorothy had fooled the balls. They hadn't got her. She was alive, he was sure now—alive in spite of those damned balls. He fell on the bed, half-laughing, half-crying.

Suddenly he stopped. A sound outside. Voices? Painfully he crawled across to look out of the window. A group of people was coming up the road. People he knew. They were wearing ordinary clothes, and among them was Dorothy—Dorothy!

He tore off his mask and tried to shout to them. Funny; his voice wouldn't work, somehow. Never mind. Dorothy had fooled the yellow balls. That was damned funny. He was laughing again as he sank to the floor.

'Yes, dear, I'm real,' said Dorothy, at the bedside.

'But—but how—?'

'When I got here I found that Daddy had gone. The only thing was for me to go, too. Several of us went down the river in a boat and rowed along nearly to Land's End. Right in the toe of Cornwall we were beyond the balls, and to windward of them. Then, when it was safe — '

'Safe?'

'Yes, dear. It's safe now. The balls are just like an ordinary fungus now—they don't attack living things any more. Then we came home and found you here.'

'But — '

'Not now. You mustn't talk any more, dear. You've been very ill, you know.'

Ralph acquiesced. He went to sleep peacefully, her hand in his and a smile on his face.

THE Prince Khordah of Ghangistan regarded the nephew of Haramin, bent low before him.

'Your plan has failed, he said.

The nephew of Haramin nodded dumbly.

'But,' continued the Prince, 'it has cost that accursed country more than did ever our wars—and we have lost nothing. Tell me, why did it fail?'

'Your Highness, the stock did not breed true. After two or so generations it was no longer a parasite, but had reverted to a common, saprophytic fungus.'

'Which, however, it will take them many years to suppress?'

'Many years,' the other repeated hopefully.

The Prince Khordah spent a few moments in contemplation.

'We are not displeased,' he said at length. 'Doubtless the first arrow did not kill a lion. There are other means, nephew of Haramin?'

The bent figure heaved a sigh of relief.

'There are other means,' he agreed.

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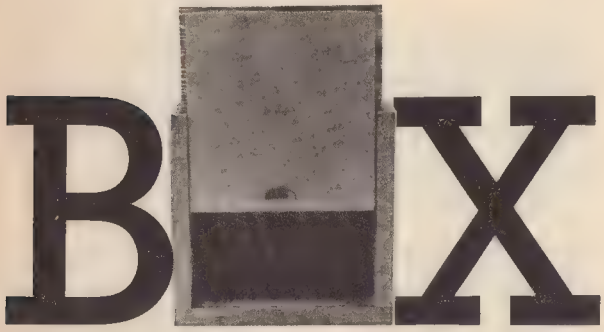
SCIENCE FICTION fans have always been noted for their intense curiosity about the genre, of which many acquire an encyclopaedic knowledge. Of recent years thousands of students have shown an increasing interest in the literature, which universities and colleges have found suitable for critical appraisal.

Readers of *Science Fiction Monthly*, in their letters to me, show an equal interest in the various aspects presented by the medium today—in the realm of books and magazines, films, radio and television, art, poetry, and the informative literature which sf is fast acquiring for itself.

So, as a regular service, we introduce THE QUERY BOX to deal with readers' questions of general interest. This new feature is conducted by Thomas Sheridan, who has long been associated with the sf field as writer, editor and critic. His library of magazines, books and reference works is one of the most comprehensive collections of its kind—and if the information you want isn't readily to hand, he will probably know where it can be found.

Send your questions to *THE QUERY BOX*, *Science Fiction Monthly*, New English Library Ltd, Barnard's Inn, Holborn, London EC1N 2JR. They will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

THE QUERY BOX



OLD-TIMERS
I hope you can provide me with information about some of the earliest sf (not ancient stories of gods and other legends), or recommend some source of literature on the subject.
Brian F Hunt, Peterborough

There is now quite an extensive library on the history of sf—or, rather, of the literature which gave birth to sf, whose lineage is often disputed. Most of these books are American in origin and are difficult to come by. One of the aims of the Science Fiction Foundation is to make such items available to students (see *SFM* Vol 1 No 1, p20).

First comprehensive study of sf's development was JO Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction* (New York, 1947) which spans more than three centuries, examining themes and outlining stories in detail. Much easier going is *Explorers of the Infinite*, by Sam Moskowitz (New York, 1963), which covers the work of outstanding writers from Cyrano to Philip Wylie—not forgetting editor Hugo Gernsback and *Amazing Stories*.

Future Perfect, by H Bruce Franklin (Oxford, 1966) is a scholarly study concentrating on American sf of the nineteenth century, with extracts from Hawthorne, Poe, Bellamy and others. Strictly for pedants but worth procuring if you haven't read it is Fitz-James O'Brien's *The Diamond Lens* of 1858 . . . fabulous! If you like to struggle with footnotes, try getting through *Into the Unknown*, by Robert M Philmus (Los Angeles, 1970) which stretches from Francis (*Man in the Moone*) Godwin to HG Wells. It delighted Asimov, anyway . . .

A rather scrappy but amusing book is Patrick Moore's *Science and Fiction* (London, 1957) which is mainly concerned with the interplanetary theme and the more disreputable aspects of American sf. No less incisive is the well-known Kingsley Amis survey, *New Maps of Hell* (London, 1960) which sets out to destroy many cherished illusions, especially concerning the origins of sf. According to Amis, it really began with Frankenstein as recently as 1818. And this judgement is echoed by Brian W Aldiss in his *Billion Year Spree* (London, 1973) which starts with Mary Shelley and ends with Anna Kavan, but still finds room for the Pilgrim Fathers, Lucian, Kepler & Co. Though not as complete as it might have been, this is the most informative history of the genre yet published; the product of ten years' research by a practised writer who could hardly leave himself out.

MIKE'S WAKE
In the front of Michael Moorcock's book *Breakfast in the Ruins* it states that he died last year of cancer; yet in your second issue is a recent picture of him playing with the one and only Hawkwind. Also, in No 1 you mentioned that his *Chronicles of Brass* was soon to be published, but my bookshop cannot locate it. Can you help solve this mystery?
P Baber, Folkestone

Pleased to report that Moorcock's death note was entirely fictitious. Though he seems slightly more retiring these days, we are assured that he is very much alive and living in the present, if not in Notting Hill. Look again and you'll see that the 'death' notice, now three years old, is signed by James Colvin, which is a pen-name once used by Mike—until he finished *him* off. He's just full of mystifying tricks like that . . . As of now, *Chronicles of Brass* is still in the publisher's pipeline, but it should be out by the time you read this.

'SKYLARK' SMITH
Reading your history of sf magazines, I noticed that EE 'Doc' Smith, whom I knew only for his brilliant *Lensman* series, wrote for several of them in the late 1920s. Could you tell me more about this American genius, and whether he is still writing!?
M Bullivant, St Peter, Jersey

Edward E Smith, PhD was indeed a name to conjure with in what became known as the Golden Age of magazine sf. His first novel, *The Skylark of Space*, serialised by *Amazing Stories* in 1928, set the fashion for the giant-size intergalactic epic, with its super-scientist heroes and villains battling it out in the far reaches of the cosmos. Not everyone could stomach his immature style, but his fans were—and still are—legion.

Two sequels featuring Richard Seaton and his evil opponent Dr DuQuesne, *Skylark Three* (1930) and *Skylark of Valeron* (1934), were supplemented by *Skylark DuQuesne* as recently as 1965—just a month before Smith died aged 75. He lived to see nearly all his magazine stories preserved in hard covers—including *Spacehounds of IPC* (1931), which wasn't too popular because it tied them up in the Solar System. But watch for the full EE Smith story in Walter Gillings' series on Modern Masters of Science Fiction.

TWO-TIME TUNNEL
To settle an argument, can you tell us if *The Time Tunnel* TV series was shown on BBC or ITV—and when?
'Tom and Jerry', Croydon, Surrey

The answer is—on *both* channels. BBC1 ran it in 1968 and it turned up again on ITV last autumn; but I can't be certain whether the episodes were exactly the same in each case.

Conducted by THOMAS SHERIDAN

Letters

I am 13 and have enjoyed your magazine very much so far. The reason I'm writing is to complain that everytime I go into a bookshop and start to look through the Arthur C Clarke books people give me looks as if to say, 'What does he think he's doing, he's far too young for that'. I remember when I bought *2001* someone said I would never be able to understand it; well I did read it and understood a very large part of it. So why don't some people give us a chance.
Martin Weare (Guildford, Surrey)

In SFM Vol 1 No 6 an anonymous ARB reviewed *Zardoz*, I found this criticism infuriating and obviously ARB has not read the book and did not pay attention to the film.

I have seen *2001* eleven times and *Zardoz* only twice, yet *Zardoz* has moved me more than *2001* ever will. I think *2001* is boring and quite beyond credibility with its use of a computer which can lip read and its totally incomprehensible ending.

I feel that ARB must just have some kind of grievance against John Boorman and Bill Stair whom I can only congratulate on producing a magnificent film and book.
M Higgins (Erith, Kent)
ARB: *Sorry you didn't like the review, but it is after all only a matter of opinion.*

Many thanks for publishing the new magazine; using the lift-out posters as features is certainly a different approach.

I'll bet you didn't get many scripts submitted from the Commonwealth countries for your story competition—or maybe other countries have been luckier than Australia—the first edition hit our news-stands on 4 July. As I haven't yet perfected time travel, it wasn't possible to enter your competition by 31 March, much as I would have liked to.
V Rogers (NSW, Australia)

A British sf magazine is back on our newsagents' racks. But for how long?

Alas, not too long, unless the format is changed in the way K Oldacre suggests in SFM Vol 1 No 6; less artwork and more fiction, since it is by the latter alone that SFM will sink or swim. I cannot help hoping that some of our eminent British authors—Arthur Clarke, James White, Bob Shaw, John Brunner, James Blish (I know, I know, but he must *feel* British by now)—should only be too delighted to contribute to the mag. After all, if SFM folds, then it is goodbye to British sf magazines.

One final point I'd like to mention is 'The Mainstream versus The New Wave' battle as typified by WJ Huggins and JT Parker (SFM Vol 1 Nos 3 and 6). Surely no magazine can consciously steer a course between the Mainstream and the New Wave without going aground before very long. One cannot reject fiction just because it belongs to one school or the other, it must be judged on its quality, not on its style or subject matter. Rest assured Mainstream fans, the rip-roaring space opera will never die (not while Clarke, White and Blish survive) it can stand proudly next to the very best of New Wave material (Spinrad, Disch and Moorcock) on any bookshelf. Clarke and Asimov will never be stopping-off places until time itself invalidates them.
W Little (Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs)
PS: Does anyone apart from myself feel that SFM readers should be given the chance to vote an award to the best fiction that appears in the magazine? I say to hell with the Hugos and the Nebulas, let's have a British mag fiction award.

Although I enjoy SFM very much there is one small criticism I would like to make. You lack a regular or feature comic strip, surely a sf publication of your versatility could come up with a top quality cartoon or two. After all I can't think of any other field in which a magazine has such wide scope in the world of fantasy and imagination, a world well suited to the cartoon strip.
NA Potter (Headington, Oxford)

Short Story Competition Results

Firstly we apologise for not announcing the results earlier in the year but we honestly didn't realise that so many of our readers were writers as well. At the most we expected 500 stories to arrive on our doorstep but with 1,000 stories to deal with we have had to read non-stop since March. Apologies aside, the standard of the stories received from the UK was so high that we have had to modify our award distribution as follows: One overall winner; one Commonwealth winner; one foreign winner; but four UK winners.

Overall winner and also one of the four best UK entries is:
David Coles, 22 Ingleby Drive, Tadcaster, Yorks LS24 8HW
who receives a prize of £150.

The three other best UK entries came from:
David H Stammers, 87 Hazell Avenue, Colchester, Essex;
David I Henderson, 43 Lansdown Crescent, Cheltenham Glos; and
Barry Sutton-Jones, 127 Taverham Road, Taverham, Norwich NOR 53X
who receive £50 each.

The best Commonwealth entry came from:
David James, 36 Fourth Avenue, Shoalwater Bay, Western Australia
who will receive a prize of £50.

And the best foreign entry came from:
Mrs Christine Stinchcombe (Belgium), c/o 7a Lansdown Terrace,
off Malvern Road, Cheltenham, Glos.,
and she receives a prize of £50.

NEWS

By Aune R Butt

THE FRANKLIN SCHOOL OF CONTEMPORARY STUDIES is offering a series of ten lectures given by George Hay of the Environmental Consortium on the subject of *Science Fiction—Mankind's Distant Early Warning System.* In giving the course this title Mr Hay explains: 'I am drawing attention to the fact that constant vigilance is still the price of freedom, and illustrating through contemporary and older sf writers how this genre is par excellence the medium where we can see this dramatised in terms that will move our intellects and hearts alike.'

George Hay's interest in sf is well-known among fans, but others who have only recently been introduced to the genre will find his lectures a great help in relating sf to the world of today. As he continues: 'More perhaps than any other medium, science fiction is all things to all men. My own approach is to view it as a Trojan Horse, a subversive item to sneak in under cover of its new-found respectability . . . If those who attend the course are indeed subverted, then I hope it will be toward a growing sense, not of doom, but of wonder.'

Beginning in October and continuing for four terms, the course costs £10 (including VAT) for ten sessions. Cheques or postal orders must accompany the registration application and should be made payable to Franklin School of Contemporary Studies Ltd, and sent to the following address: The Registrar, Franklin School of Contemporary Studies, 43 Adelaide Road, London NW3.

Upon acceptance into the course, an admission card will be posted to each student. Applicants should register as early as possible since there is a maximum number of twenty students for each class. The School is also open for personal registration, and catalogues listing full courses are available from the Registrar. The School can be reached from Chalk Farm tube station, or by a No 31 bus which goes along Adelaide Road.

The One Tun

GLOBE MEETINGS—Contrary to our expectations in *Science Fiction Monthly 5*, the *White Horse* pub in Fetter Lane has been rejected as the new temporary home of the first-Thursday-of-the-month science fiction meetings; it was decided that the bar there was too small to accommodate the circle comfortably, so another establishment—*The One Tun* in Saffron Hill—has been chosen instead. This pub is only forty or fifty yards from *The Globe* and has the advantage of being extremely commodious—an important asset if many of our readers intend to introduce themselves there. The barman of *The One Tun* is a friend of Lou Mordecai who was at the *White Horse* when the sf meetings began; it seems as if that connection is proving very durable. Let's hope the meetings of today manage to be as fruitful and long-lasting!

FILM NEWS FROM AMERICA—Rollerball, *described as a sci-fi picture about a potentially lethal twenty-first century sport, will be filmed for United Artists by producer Norman Jewison. The screenplay is to be written by William Harrison as an adaptation of his story* Rollerball Murders.

Another science fiction picture now in the process of filming in Jamaica is Tomorrow is Never. *Jason North produces, with Hope Lange starring.*

THE WELL-KNOWN AMERICAN FANZINE *Riverside Quarterly* is now available to readers in the UK through a British agent, Christopher Fowler of 72 Kenilworth Avenue, Southcote, Reading RG3 3DN. Subscriptions cost £1 for five copies, and most back issues are available at 25p each. Please address all enquiries to Chris at the above address.

STAR TREK ACTION GROUP—*commonly known as STAG—is the largest* Star Trek *club in Europe; since the society is only just over a year old this is a remarkable achievement. The club acts through President and 'crewmember' Jenny Elson (16 Stafford Drive, Wigston, Leicester LE8 2YA) for* Star Trek Welcommittee, *and also as an information centre. James 'Scotty' Doohan is an honorary member and was one of the Guests of Honour at the first British Star Trek Convention held this September. Activities include a very lively newsletter issued every two months containing news, articles (both serious and humorous), information, and auctions. In an auction held in May, for example, three original* Star Trek *scripts (rare items to get hold of now), donated by James Doohan who used them on the set, came under the hammer. STAG also produces several fanzines, one called* Beta Niote *being fairly regular; these are soon due to be printed rather than duplicated, and they contain good ST fiction. Other projects are the compiling of* The Anatomy and Physiology of a Vulcan *and a poetry book. Fees are 80p per year or £1.50 for life membership. Any inquiries should be sent to: Janet Quarton, Membership Secretary, Lodge Cottage, Bury Farm, Pednor Road, Chesham, Bucks, or to the President, Jenny Elson at the address given in the first paragraph. Science fiction fans with a penchant for the Star Trek type of thing are welcome to join this lively group, especially if they feel like contributing articles and the like on the ST theme!*

Many readers seem to have the impression that the paragraphs included on books are meant to represent actual book reviews; in fact they are only intended to be a quick *guide* to some books which are newly published or due to be published soon, so that the reader can look out for them in bookshops. Very often the blurb about them is sketchy because publication at the time of our going to press has not advanced sufficiently for any review copy to be available.

Books

The Moons of Jupiter by Isaac Asimov. *Published by New English Library, 35p. This is number six of Asimov's Space Ranger series, and is concerned with the sabotage of a revolutionary advance in space travel. Only a handful of highly-trusted men were supposed to know the secret. But someone else knew! For David Starr it was probably the most important and dangerous mission he had ever faced. He had to find the mysterious saboteur before the damage became irreparable. But the unknown enemy did not seem to be human. Not even remotely human!*

Final Solution by Richard E Peck. Published by Robert Hale & Co, £1.70. This chilling tale begins in a familiar way—a university and a riot—but this time the riot is successful, and a new epoch begins.

The Best of AE Van Vogt 1940-1968. Published by Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.75. A collection of AE Van Vogt's short stories including: **The Weapon Shop**—it advertised weapons, the finest available, but its purpose went deeper; **The Monster**—the aliens sought to colonise Earth but one resurrected man beat them to it; **Silkies in Space**—they could be human, but they were something more than man. The anthology also includes a complete bibliography and an introduction by AE Van Vogt.

Space Probe by Graham Garner. **Published by Robert Hale & Co, £1.70. Philo Burke was a troubleshooter for the vast Kane Zanther Starfreight Company and his job was to ensure punctual and trouble-free running of the starships, but Vaso Preston and his space pirates were a menace that was slowly but surely getting out of hand.**

Hook: Star City by Tully Zetford. *Published by New English Library, 30p. Number three in NEL's space superhero series. The Boosted Men are searching the galaxy for Hook but he escapes and arrives, a penniless adventurer, on Star City. This is a tremendous space city made up of many inter-connecting levels and domes, which orbits a relatively primitive planet inhabited by extra-terrestrial aliens who are exploited by the human although non-Terran inhabitants of Star City. Hook is revolted by this exploitation and feels he must stand with the people of the planet. The Boosted Men interfere and Hook is involved in a fight to free the aliens so that they can find their own destiny.*

The Wonder Effect by Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth. **Published by Panther Books, about 40p. A collection of science fiction short stories by sf's most famous writing team. Fred Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth get together once more to produce a first-class series of stories.**

The Time Masters by Wilson Tucker. *Published by Panther Books, 40p. Two immortal aliens from another world have been living on earth ever since time began. Now they are discovered, involving paradox in time and space.*

In the Kingdom of the Beasts and **Day of Wrath** by Brian Stableford. Published by Quartet Books, 40p each. The final two volumes of Stableford's stunning dies irae trilogy, now available for the first time in a British edition. Ten thousand years in the future a madman is employing his ability to warp space and time to create the Beast War, the bloodiest conflict in cosmic history, simply to get his revenge on a world which has long ceased to exist. But somewhere there is still one human who is prepared to fight back—Mark Chaos and his epic adventures through the shifting, distorted dimensions of a cosmos ruled by fear, disorder and slavery form the basis of this classic series.

***The Best of Fritz Leiber 1944-1970.* Published by Sidgwick & Jackson, £2.75. A collection of twenty-two short stories by Fritz Leiber which is intended to demonstrate the development of his fascinating talent. It includes: *Gonna Roll the Bones*—Joe Slattermill knew he could roll dice better than any other man in Night Town, but then he played against the Big Gambler; *The Big Trek*—he didn't know where he was or how he got there, but he did know he shouldn't be able to understand the creatures he met; *Mariana*—she was faced with a series of switches which turned off her world, and the last one of all had her own name on it. The anthology also has a complete bibliography and an introduction by Fritz Leiber.**

Skylark of Valeron & Skylark Duquesne by EE 'Doc' Smith. Published by Panther Books, 35p each. Third and fourth in the famous 'Skylark' saga of adventure in interstellar space. Super-scientist Richard Seaton travels the galaxy in his various amazing Skylark spacecraft, opposed by evil scientific genius Dr Marc Duquesne.

The Abominations of Yondo by Clark Ashton Smith. Published by Panther Books, about 40p. A collection of short stories on the horror/fantasy theme.

In Search of Ancient Mysteries by Alan & Sally Landsburg. Published by Corgi Books, 50p. What exists in the small patch of the Atlantic Ocean known as the Bermuda Triangle which has devoured more than a hundred ships and aircraft during the past two centuries alone? Why does virtually every culture on Earth contain a legend of a great flood? Where did ancient civilisations acquire their vast knowledge of astronomy and mathematics? Why do men think of their gods as looking down from the sky? Alan and Sally Landsburg found themselves on the trail of these and other strange phenomena when they went in search of ancient mysteries.

PERHAPS this funny little man really ought to be taken more seriously on his first visit to Earth.

After all, the planet Sirius is reported to be several hundred years more technologically advanced than our own; quite capable of being extremely unpleasant if its ambassador is insulted!

At the moment this is only a science fiction artist's view of the first contact between the human race and other intelligent creatures. Even so, in a humorous way the cover illustration from *Galaxy* magazine (1955) does raise an important problem, one which may eventually have to be faced in reality.

Why should we expect alien beings to resemble ourselves? And how can we possibly expect to deal with creatures who look so *peculiar*?

It's a good question and it has inspired some of the very best science fiction. It doesn't really matter whether extra-terrestrials (ETs) look like us, are funny, frightening, or completely outside our experience. Somehow we are going to have to learn to get along with each other.

How do you talk to a black cloud, an intelligent ocean, or an energy-being resembling ball-lightning? All have been the subjects of science fiction novels, which shows the far-reaching nature of the field. Even closer to home, relatively minor cultural differences continue to cause misunderstanding and distrust between, for example, Arab and Jew, or Protestant and Catholic. At our present level of civilisation, peaceful contact with alien life-forms doesn't appear to be a very hopeful prospect.

Life was so much simpler in the rawer days of magazine science fiction, when strange creatures could generally be relied upon to be slavering BEMs (bug-eyed monsters). Heroes did not have to worry overmuch about creating the right impression or being misunderstood; they simply shot at aliens, ran away from aliens, or (if female and attractive) were abducted by aliens.

It was a pattern which dated back to the early years of this century, one which I suspect was set by HG Wells' extraordinary novel, *The War of the Worlds* (1895), still one of the very best stories of interplanetary invasion.

Wells' octupoid Martians were quite remorselessly bent upon the destruction of the Victorian world. They had not the slightest interest in the exchange of scientific knowledge, or other modern-day rationales for space travel. They came to conquer and destroy because, their author implied, Mars was used-up, a barren and dying world.

Arrival of the Ambassador from Sirius V

As an extra touch to his masterpiece, Wells also suggested that the invaders would keep a few survivors of humanity, almost as prize cattle, fattening them up as juicy titbits for Martian appetites. No doubt this detail sent shivers down the whale-boned spines of his readers!

Wells was showing one aspect of contact between different races and cultures, one which has so many historical precedents that it may indeed be the most likely possibility. His Martian invasion only repeated, in slightly more extreme form, the experience of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, or perhaps the more recent extermination of the Tasmanian aboriginals by the first white settlers.

His book was inspired by its times. One ingredient was the growing scale and the realisation of the increasing horror of mechanised warfare. And then the Italian astronomer Schiaparelli discovered the existence of 'canals' on Mars in 1888. Wells was able to synthesise the two elements and thus produce his frightening novel.

The War of the Worlds certainly was frightening, as was proven in 1938 by its radio broadcast in the United States. It was also a tremendously popular novel, and its very success has provoked any number of imitators, right down to the present day.

But Wells had two great advantages, a fertile imagination and a gift for writing. Far too many of his successors have lacked both.

In fact, sad though it may be, the advent of magazine science fiction tended to debase the entire theme of contact with alien life. There was too much interest in ray guns, monsters and other dramatic trappings at the expense of anything really new or thoughtful. How many invasions from Mars have there been since 1895?

And so in many respects science fiction became a breeding ground for BEMs, particularly in the more lurid US 'pulp' magazines of the 1930s and 1940s. Titles abounded in the early days, such as *Amazing, Astounding, Astonishing, Startling, Thrilling Wonder*, and so on, each rivalling the other in their extravagance.

Let's not be snobbish; these magazines were great fun to read. But with a few notable exceptions their appearance could hardly be said to advance the standing of science fiction as a 'respectable' literature dealing with important and serious intellectual concepts.

Still, some of the great names in sf circles made their reputations by inventing BEMs. AE Van Vogt is the classic example, whose first published story *Black Destroyer* (July 1939) caused a minor sensation. He followed that with an even nastier *Scarlet Destroyer*, and finally worked up to a Galaxy-wide people-eater. You can't get much more ambitious than that! (The stories are available as *Voyage of the Space Beagle*.)

Another famous personality is John W Campbell, who is probably better known through his transformation of *Astounding* into the one 'mature' science fiction magazine during the 1940s. Campbell is not widely remembered as a writer except for one spine-chilling story, *Who Goes There* (1938), subsequently made into an incredibly bad horror film as *The Thing From Another World*.

Campbell's ET inspires complete xenophobic hatred and fear. It is a creature able to devour a man, and then re-form and exactly imitate its victim so perfectly that the substitution cannot be detected . . . until the *next* man is alone with the monster! Gradually we realise that some of the characters in the story have been taken—but which? The scene is vividly described, as the small party huddles together in their Antarctic camp, blizzard howling outside, knowing that some of their members are monsters and wondering how many . . . for when the creatures are strong enough they will come out of hiding.

Campbell really lays on the horror in a way calculated to provoke nightmares. Every description suggests that these things cannot be reasoned with, they can only be killed: 'Three mad, hate-filled eyes blazed up with a living fire, bright as fresh-spilled blood, from a face ringed with a writhing, loathsome nest of worms, blue mobile worms that crawled where hair should grow—'.

Other writers have added refinements to xenophobia. Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* depicts slug-like aliens from Titan, who ride upon people's backs and (through the spinal cord and brain) can control their actions. Again, no compromise is possible; nor is it with the equally revolting Pythsyccans in Bob Shaw's *The Palace of Eternity*, except here it is the aliens who shoot first and ask questions later!

Campbell, Van Vogt, Shaw and Heinlein took care to make their stories unforgettable by being original. But they are in a minority, for it is just too easy to invent menacing aliens. In fact a very considerable number of extra-terrestrial powers have seemed anxious to invade Earth, regardless of cost or personal inconvenience to themselves. It was a great day for magazine science fiction when someone asked 'Why should they bother?'.

That person was Campbell again, in an *Astounding* editorial in the early 1960s. He tried to examine in a logical way the reasons why an advanced space-travelling intelligence should be interested in our planet. In the end there didn't appear to be many. He concluded that interstellar traffic of any sort would only be worthwhile for things like works of art, native crafts and curios, or for pure knowledge. None of these is best obtained through conquest and invasion, and so out of the window go all those carnivorous Martians and slave empires!

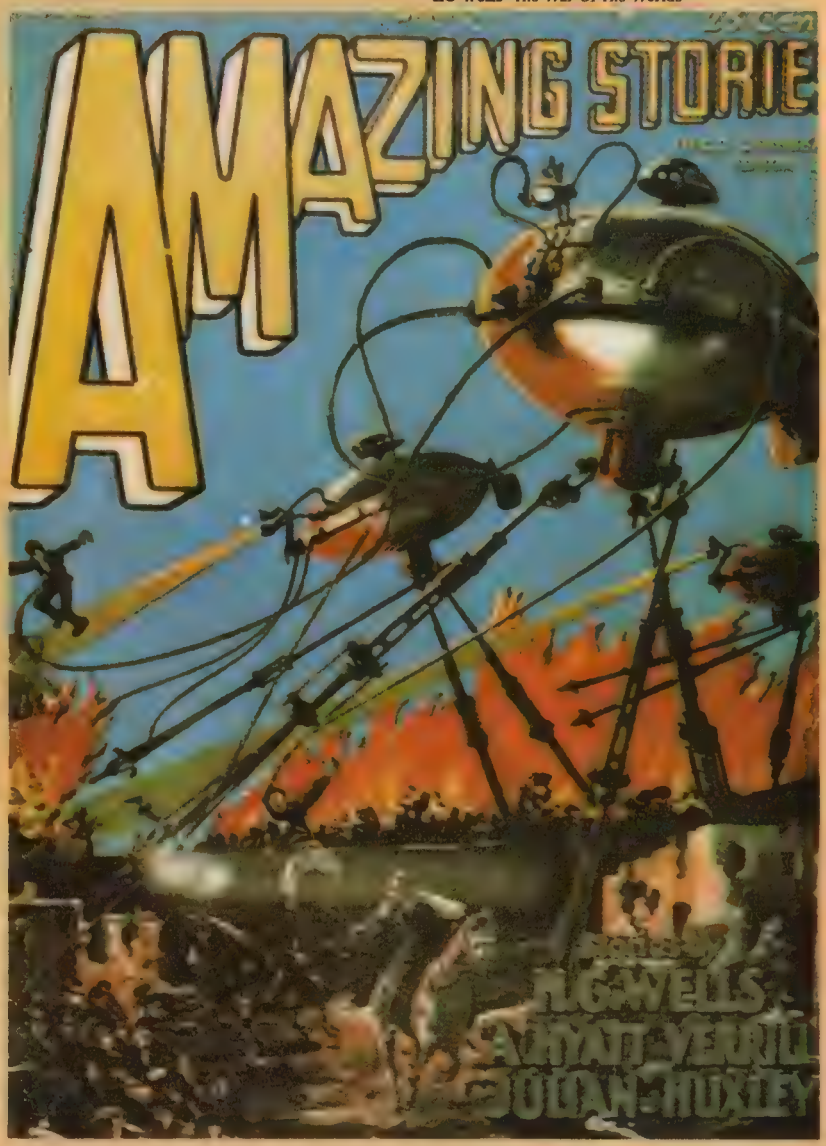
Of course, Campbell was only formalising a conclusion reached long ago by nearly all major practitioners of science fiction. Through the years writers have imagined every alternative besides conflict, and without coming anywhere near to exhausting the possibilities, some of the treatments of alien contact are listed below:

1 The 'Nasty' Alien; totally inimical, usually preoccupied with invasion of Earth
2 Evil Earthman—exploited natives
3 Superior Beings (either completely indifferent or intent upon showing us the error of our ways)
4 The 'Hard Science' alien life-form
5 Meeting of equals
6 Making of extra-terrestrial life
7 Parodies

Those titles are descriptive enough for the contents of stories in each category to be guessed. The 'Nasty' theme has already been described, and today it has almost become a cliché in science fiction, like cops-&-robbers or cowboys-&-indians in other types of fiction.

Oddly enough the whole business is now gaining increasing relevance and increasing respectability. The British Interplanetary Society has now designed a workable interstellar probe rocket and we already have NASA's science of Exobiology ('the only physical science without a subject matter'). At present leading astronomers and space programme officials in the USA are seriously debating the possibility of making contact with another civilisation.

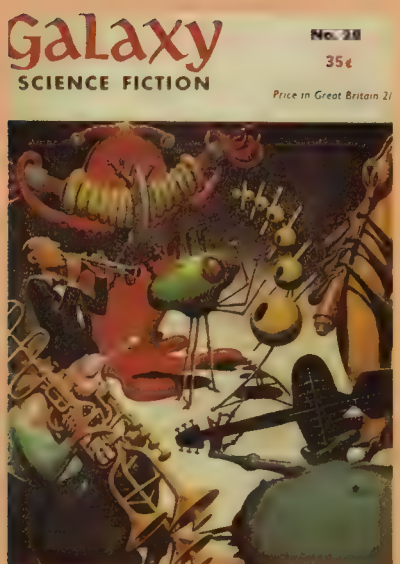
Project OZMA, begun fifteen years ago to send coded messages to the nearer stars, now seems to have been unnecessary. Earth stands out like a beacon in space because of our television broadcasting, say astronomers such as Carl Sagan in his book *The Cosmic Connection*. Some eminent authorities are questioning whether we should not instead attempt to 'cover up and keep quiet', rather than try to attract attention. 'What if alien beings are hostile?' they ask worriedly, ignoring the fact that science fiction began to think seriously about this



The Martian war-machines conquer the Earth, in HG Wells' *The War Of The Worlds*

Three mad, hate-filled eyes blazed up with a living fire, bright as fresh-spilled blood, from a face ringed with a writhing, loathsome nest of worms, blue, mobile worms that crawled where hair should grow.

In Solaris, Stanislaw Lem creates an alien being which takes the form of an entire planetary ocean, billions of tons of protoplasmic liquid, which appears to have a life of its own.



Man and alien may have *some* things in common—this picture shows the Chamber Music Society of Deneb!

possibility at least fifty years ago.

Wicked aliens are old hat; far more fashionable in sf circles are stories wherein human explorers are ready to exploit and abuse whatever native forms of life may exist on a new planet. The younger, newer writers of science fiction seem to be particularly attracted to this theme. Some, like Barry N Malzberg, seem to feel that the explosion of humanity into space may be the worst thing that could happen to the Universe.

An excellent treatment of the idea can be found in Brian Aldiss' *The Dark Light Years*, a 1964 novel in which his aliens are so different, physically and mentally, that their most basic social customs are disgusting to us. This immediately puts his 'utods' off to a bad start with a future Earth civilisation all too anxious to mine, colonise and fight wars upon other people's property. 'Other people'—that's the point. For Aldiss shows that the utods *are* people, despite their habit of wallowing in excrement. The sympathies of the reader are entirely on their side and yet the Earth explorers will never admit that the utods are more than animals to be exploited. Aldiss' book is one of the best, and it attempts to show that bridges must be built across the gaps between minds. He says that Might is not Right, yet his novel is quietly depressing in that it reflects the more likely probability that even the most well-meaning explorers will, for one reason or other, exterminate or enslave anyone unlucky enough to be in their way.

Where Brian Aldiss points a warning finger, Robert Heinlein sings the praises of mankind's aggressive nature. In *Starship Troopers* (1959) the message is 'Universe: Watch Out!' This controversial novel is vivid, fast-moving and realistic in the way that only Heinlein can describe a future society. But he has no empathy with, and no time for, aliens of any description. Despite its glitter and rationalisations, *Starship Troopers* is as xenophobic as Campbell's classic of the 1930s.

There are vast numbers of other examples. Perhaps almost a unique viewpoint is shown in Isaac Asimov's little-known short-story, *Blind Alley* (from *Astounding*, March 1945, and in *The Early Asimov*). He asks what place will there be for the only other intelligent race ever discovered, in a Galaxy entirely colonised by mankind? This is the only reference Asimov ever makes to ETs in his entire 'Galactic Empire' saga of seven novels, and his conclusion is sad. Despite the best-intentioned care and protection these beings simply lose their will to live; there is nothing left for a species so out-numbered and so outclassed.

Very advanced alien civilisations in science fiction are often benevolent, if they have any interest in the human race at all. Sometimes they are interested in scientific study, rather as we write articles for the Sunday colour supplements on the customs of the Papuan natives. Often they completely ignore humanity (when did you last visit Papua?); and occasionally they try to improve our sorry state (they make the natives wear trousers).

Arthur C Clarke has paid some attention to this theme, and his two most powerful works have the same conclusion. His 1952 novel *Childhood's End* introduced the space-travelling race known as the 'Overlords', who put a stop to the petty quarrelling of mankind and impose their own kind of order, leading eventually to a transformation of our species to a level immeasurably far beyond that of today.

Clarke is delivering almost a mystic vision, one which so effectively concludes the film *2001* (for which he and Stanley Kubrick wrote the screenplay) in which the newly-reborn 'Star Baby' returns to the planet of its origin:

'For though he was Master of the World, he was not quite sure what to do next. But he would think of something.'

Writers in Clarke's class are rare, but there are others. Olaf Stapledon was a great semi-metaphysical writer of the 1930s, and in recent science fiction there is Stanislaw Lem with *Solaris*.

Solaris transcends an arbitrary dividing line in this classification, between the categories of 'Superior Being' and the 'Hard Science' approach. Lem's alien being is a wonder indeed; it is an entire planetary ocean, billions of tons of protoplasmic liquid, which in some mysterious way appears to have a life of its own. But the intelligence of the ocean must be so different from our own that it is hard to imagine any common ground existing. The entire novel is about communication, although in the end the ocean of the planet Solaris remains a puzzle, and a scientific curiosity.

The ocean may be a 'superior being', but it is indifferent to the human race. Although Lem puts a great deal more into his novel than speculation about the nature of his alien being, the scientific content is very important. *Solaris* therefore tends to approach the very pure, 'hard' form of sf, which at its ultimate is not concerned with character interplay or with any moral 'message'.

Because so many science fiction authors and readers *are* scientists of one type or another, 'hard' sf has always been popular. The acknowledged master practitioner in this area is Hal Clement. He made his debut in the halcyon days of *Astounding* in the early 1940s, when a whole school of new writers under the direction of John Campbell was exploring new directions in sf story-telling techniques. In many ways Clement reverted to the type of story originally proposed in 1926 (by Hugo Gernsback, founder of magazine science fiction) as the only interest of his new field—where the scientific content was entirely dominant.

But where the scientific content of so many Gernsbackian stories was spurious, Clement was immediately distinguished by his pains-taking and original approach, specialising in the depiction of alien beings and alien environments. In thirty years this author has

But what if there *are* little green men? Science fiction parodies itself in Fredric Brown's *Martians, Go Home!*

created an incredibly wide range of extra-terrestrials, including energy beings living inside suns, intelligent comets, creatures breathing sulphur vapours, and others living at 600G. In every case his conceptions are eminently believable and so far as we can tell, perfectly feasible.

His most famous setting is the world of Mesklin, based on the astronomical discovery of a planet of 61 Cygni. In *Mission Of Gravity* (1952) Clement described this world, a huge but rapidly-spinning planet whose gravity varied from 600G (at the poles) to a 'mere' 3G at the equator. The consequent equatorial bulge of Mesklin led fellow-author Isaac Asimov to describe it as a 'poached egg in the sky'. Clement's accompanying account of the building of his world is a joy in itself; it is climaxed by the advent of his aliens, 18-inch centipedes who are perfectly suited to the extremes of their environment.

The only trouble with Clement's fiction is that while physically incredible, his creatures have a mentality which is always entirely human by mid-twentieth century, North American standards. This allows Clement to tell large parts of his stories from within the skulls of his ET characters (when they have skulls). We must, perhaps,

accept that his achievement is great enough, and that Clement's concern is with the body and the environment, and not with the mind.

Two more authors stand out in this crowded field. James White in his 'Sector General' series has created a further rich selection of assorted aliens, although the background he has chosen permits him to spend less time on details of their environments.

Larry Niven is the most recent newcomer to have made his mark; he has already collected a haul of assorted awards for his depiction of strange places and strange peoples in the depths of space. Niven is often regarded as a 'hard sf' author, in that his approach is objective and empirical in contrast to the subjective view of Aldiss or Malzberg. Certainly his aliens are bizarre enough, and yet logically based. They include the unforgettable three-legged, two-headed puppeteers; the tiger-like kzin; the fat, white, featureless bandersnatchi, and the immobile, telepathic Grogs.

Each is sufficiently strange in mind as well as body so that contact between the races is forever revealing new surprises and new delights. The puppeteers, for example, are complete and absolute cowards; this attitude governs all of their dealings with the rest of the Universe, and the only individuals of the species to trust their lives in spaceships or in dealing with other races are regarded as insane.

The major difference between the rather more solemn approach of Clement (or the self-flagellation of Malzberg) is that Niven is the perpetual tourist. He feels that exploring the Universe will be *fun*; and this attitude comes across very clearly in his fiction.

By and large Larry Niven's aliens are roughly equivalent to humans in their cultural achievements. To him they very definitely *are* people—and he prefers to see the good side of humanity rather than the bad, so there is no exploitation or oppression in his works. His explorers meet other races as equals in the Universe.

In 1945 Murray Leinster wrote a story that perfectly illustrated the problems of a first contact between two such races. That story was *First Contact* (*Astounding*, May 1945), and it described the encounter in space between an exploring vessel from Earth and a craft from a humanoid civilisation at a roughly parallel level. The two peoples appear to have a great deal in common, and both sides are apparently friendly. But, can either ship trust the other?

Like two strange dogs, the ships circle and sniff each other, not wanting to fight but not daring to turn their backs. The stakes are high; the prizes are the locations of each race's home-world. Like it or not, in the absence of trust they may be forced to fight. It is an intriguing situation, and Leinster sets it up so well that no real solution does exist. Nevertheless this is one of the first times that science fiction used a meeting with aliens to explore the problems of diplomacy rather than strange aspects of physiology or psychology.

As an amusing consequence of this story, a Russian writer by the name of Ivan Yefremov wrote an indignant rebuttal to Leinster's story. In his novel *Cor Serpentis*, Yefremov specifically mentions and attempts to discredit the premises of *First Contact*. Yefremov's thesis is that whatever their appearance, all advanced races will be communists, this being the only possible end-product of social evolution on any planet. His travellers from the World Soviet meet a race of fluorine-breathing aliens, but they meet as Comrades. Trust is complete; they link hands beneath the stars and no doubt sing the *Internationale*!

Subsequent disputes between the USSR and Red China on our own world may cast some doubts upon Yefremov's visionary hopes. Leinster's approach is generally considered the more realistic of the two.

Alien life-forms hold so much fascination for science fiction enthusiasts that if authors do not discover ETs, they have attempted to manufacture them. A great many stories have revolved around synthetic beings, or humans artifically mutated to live in strange environments.

The latter prospect is frightening, and yet the first steps have already been taken to make this a practical step in the biological laboratories. In any case mankind naturally adapts to extremes of environment; the best-known example is that of the Peruvian Indians, who live and work in the rarified air of the Andes.

Science fiction takes this sort of adaptation much further, and then speculates; having created such beings, are they still human? The best resolution of this question can be found in James Blish's book *The Seedling Stars*, where in the final story his 'Adapted Men' have come to outnumber the original human stock and Earth itself, the home-world, has become uninhabitable for unchanged people. Blish asks, 'What then *is* a human?' and concludes that the original race of Adam has become just one splinter-group upon the varied family of mankind.

Blish has made some of the definitive statements on pantropy (his word), the science of adapting men for their new worlds. In the book referred to above he creates both inhabitants for Ganymede, breathing methane and with bones of Ice IV, as well as a warm-blooded, tailed, tree-dwelling folk. His most successful and best-loved story is *Surface Tension*, in which he depicts a world of microscopic, water-dwelling men who in the end manage to climb out of their pond and conquer the stars—they think!

It is in the field of parody, however, that aliens come into their own. This final category is evidence, if it were needed, of a sense of humour among science fiction writers, a healthy sign that they can laugh at their own clichés and through parody make them anew. It is no accident that of the four examples chosen, three were written by Fredric Brown, science fiction's master of the tongue-in-cheek.

In *What Mad Universe* (1951), Brown takes all the clichés of the crudest pulp magazines, and contrives to make them real. For a hundred pages our hero stumbles bemused through a world in which General Eisenhower commands the Venus section of the Earth Space Fleet; in which space-girls really do wear metallic bra-&-pants, and where purple monsters from the Moon arrive on the 7.30 Luna shuttle every night.

In an utterly delicious way Brown manages to give a logical explanation for the most outrageous excesses of the pulp magazines, including the most ravenous, toothy Arcturian monsters one can imagine. His novel is witty, controlled and ingenious; everything which the worst of the pulps were not.

What does Brown think of aliens? In his second novel, *Rogue In Space*, he introduces an intelligent asteroid, a being as strange as the ocean of *Solaris* or Fred Hoyle's *Black Cloud*. True to form, however, Brown's rogue planetoid has none of their pretensions and is an amiable, roving wanderer of the spaceways.

In *Martians Go Home*, Brown turned out the ultimate parody on the threadbare theme of the 'little green men from Mars'. One day, he declares, little green men suddenly appear on Earth. Millions of them, one for every three people. They are insubstantial and thus cannot be hurt, destroyed or confined; they can teleport, thus can go *anywhere*, and they are the rudest, nastiest, most loud-voiced irreverent little green men that can be imagined.

They swiftly bring organised life to a halt. Imagine a honeymoon with a little green man waiting patiently in the room (oh yes, they can see in the dark as well). Imagine a cinema, theatre, any gathering, with scores of raucous voices disrupting all proceedings. They were insufferable—and had to be suffered!

'Green was a swear word. Anybody who owned anything green dyed it, or repainted it, threw it away or burned it if he couldn't change its colour. Some people even ploughed up their gardens and lawns. Several countries, including and especially Eire, changed their flags. . . .'

There is an underlying, more serious message. Extracted and condensed it might be that 'Wars are not only fought with bullets', or perhaps 'Learn to leave others alone and we'll leave you alone'. In any case the story makes hilarious reading.

The very last reference is to William Tenn, just to show how widely science fiction has ranged in its treatments of the 'alien' theme. The genre has come a long way from the early days of monsters and BEMs, and as if to emphasise this, Tenn's story is called The Flat-Eyed Monster (*Galaxy*, 1955).

After all, everything is relative. To a race that was *really* bug-eyed, what would a human being look like?

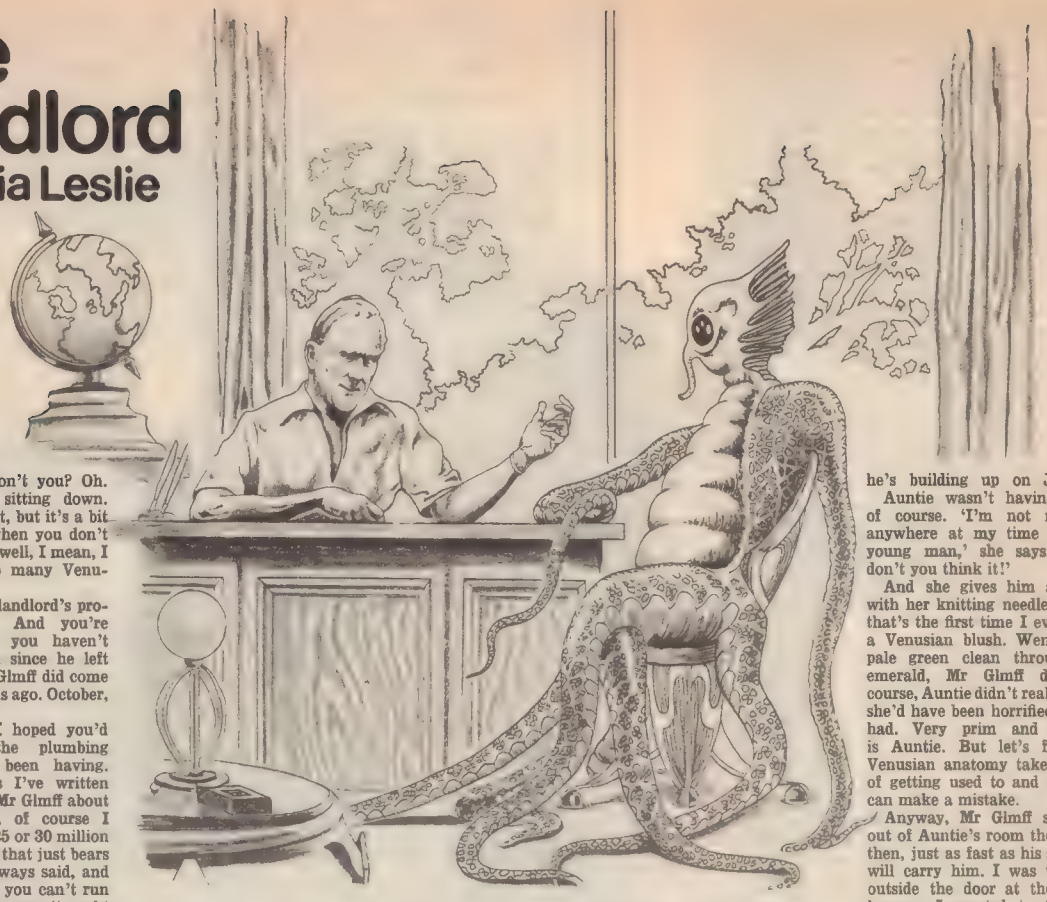
Frederic Brown takes all the clichés of the crudest pulp magazines and invents worlds where space-girls wear metallic bra-&-pants and purple monsters from the Moon arrive on the 7.30 Luna shuttle every night.

The reptilian aliens in Arthur C Clarke's *Jupiter V* would have been good neighbours, but they became extinct over two million years ago

May creates a being able to live under the hellish conditions at the surface of Jupiter, in Poul Anderson's *Call Me Joe*

The Landlord

by Delia Leslie



John Bolton

Do sit down, won't you? Oh. You're already sitting down. Sorry and all that, but it's a bit difficult to tell when you don't know which . . . well, I mean, I haven't met too many Venusians.

So you're the landlord's property manager. And you're wondering why you haven't heard from him since he left Venus? Yes, Mr Glmff did come here a few months ago. October, I think it was.

I must say, I hoped you'd come about the plumbing troubles we've been having. Goodness knows I've written often enough to Mr Glmff about them. Yes, yes, of course I realise Venus is 25 or 30 million miles away. And that just bears out what I've always said, and I'll say it again, you can't run a block of flats the way it ought to be run at that kind of distance.

No doubt about it, you foreign landlords always have been a problem. Couple of hundred years ago, it was Poles, Germans and so on, bought up half London before we knew where we were. But at least they were our kind of foreigner and they cottoned on to our ways in the long run. Only now every darn property speculator in the Galaxy wants to get in on the act. You folk should stick to real estate on your own planets, and I don't care if the Extraterrestrial Relations Board does hear me say so.

Take the plumbing I keep writing to you about. For the past six months it has been totally impossible to get any running water that is less than 200 degrees Fahrenheit. And that's out of the cold tap. Out of the hot tap, all we get is steam. Just because anything less than 300 degrees sets a Venusian's teeth chattering, every time I want to clean my teeth I have to stand a tumbler of water in the refrigerator for half an hour.

And the room temperature. What do you mean it's 110 degrees, isn't it? Yes, it is 110 degrees and it's been 110 degrees for the past six months and that 110 degrees isn't coming out of the central heating, it's blasting out of the air coolers. And I have spent more than 70 credits on astrograms telling you about this and I haven't had one single answer.

Yes, I know Venusians go into hibernation in your winter rains season. Mr Glmff told me. But our ground rents don't go into hibernation, do they? And before you boys get your heads down, you don't forget to tell the Galactic Exchange Bank to send us our bills for service charges.

Service charges! Some service, I must say. Improvements, modernisations . . . well, Mr Glmff's improvements I prefer to live without, I assure you. Take that Venusian air purifier, for instance. Pumps the smell of over-ripe bananas through every air conditioner in the block. Let me tell you, between Venus and Bayswater, there is definitely an olfactory difference of opinion!

And what about that passenger lift you installed last summer? Maybe it is the latest thing in Venus City. But you didn't stop to think about a little thing like the difference in atmospheric pressures, did you? First time someone touches the call button, that lift shoots clean through the roof and your engineer's out there clinging on for dear life with all twelve tentacles wrapped round the Tri-D aerial. We had to call the fire brigade to get him down.

And those Venusian cacti that Mr Glmff sent along for the front garden, the ones that make a kind of glopping noise when they're about to flower. See that ginger cat sunning himself on the wall down there? The minute one of those plants went glop, that old cat let out a yip and scooted and we didn't see him for a week. But dogs now, they're different. Don't have them on Venus, do you. Well, a dog thinks he sees a new kind of tree and he gets interested. Like I told Mr Glmff, it's a dog's nature and nothing anyone can do about it. If you ask me, those plants wouldn't have lasted long in our climate anyway.

The garden looked a bit bare when the Venusian cacti died off. That's when Auntie started planting a few things here and there. Flowers, bushes and so on. Auntie? She's been here so long we've almost forgotten her name. Must be ninety or more I reckon. Real old-fashioned in the nicest kind of way. Always knitting, bakes her own cakes, grows pot plants on the windowsills. Like something out of a history book, especially with those crazy glasses she wears that slip down her nose. Won't hear of having optilens fitted.

When Mr Glmff bought this block of flats, he wanted to get Auntie out. She hasn't paid any rent for years, but he can't sue her. Protection of Senior Citizens Act you know. And Auntie knows her rights. No one pulls any wool over her eyes, I can tell you.

Mr Glmff doesn't give up though. He tried again when he came down here in October. Wanted Auntie to move out to one of those apartment blocks he's building up on Jupiter.

Auntie wasn't having any, of course. 'I'm not moving anywhere at my time of life, young man,' she says, 'And don't you think it!'

And she gives him a poke with her knitting needle. Well, that's the first time I ever saw a Venusian blush. Went from pale green clean through to emerald, Mr Glmff did. Of course, Auntie didn't realise and she'd have been horrified if she had. Very prim and proper is Auntie. But let's face it, Venusian anatomy takes a bit of getting used to and anyone can make a mistake.

Anyway, Mr Glmff scurries out of Auntie's room there and then, just as fast as his six legs will carry him. I was waiting outside the door at the time, because I wanted to talk to Mr Glmff about the plumbing, same as I mentioned to you, and one or two other little things, like a new food dispenser unit and the Tri-D screen needs adjusting . . .

But Mr Glmff refused to listen to a word I said. Instead, he started getting nasty about those glopping Venusian cacti. Said he'd see we paid for a new lot, spacefreight charges and all, and wouldn't believe me when I explained about the neighbourhood dogs just getting curious.

Well, Mr Glmff seemed pretty upset so I said to him why didn't he come and have a look at the garden and all the plants Auntie had put in. Lovely show we had, I remember. Chrysanthemums, autumn roses . . . it really was a picture. Of course, it's all spring flowers now, daffodils, snowdrops . . . in fact, why don't you come and see for yourself?

Just wait a moment. Might as well take the watering can down with me. Have to leave it in the refrigerator you know. Way the water comes out of the taps here, would scald any Earth plants to death.

Mr Glmff? Yes, well I'm getting around to telling you. Mr Glmff started looking round the garden, same as you're doing now . . .

Just smell those narcissi! Oh, all right. But even if you do prefer Venusian plants that go glop, I'm sure there's no need to stick that snorkel outfit on. . . .

Mr Glmff didn't seem to appreciate Auntie's flowers either. He just kept going on and on about his glopping Venusian cacti and how many credits he was going to put on our service charges to pay for a new lot, when out toddles Auntie to water the chrysanthemums.

Er, now this is where we get to the part I really feel very embarrassed about telling you. Maybe it wouldn't have happened if Auntie would only get proper optilens fitted instead of wearing those crazy old-fashioned glasses. But as I said earlier, anyone can make a mistake.

I can see you're not with me. Well, picture it for yourself. There's Auntie, standing there with her watering can, and she doesn't see too well. And there's Mr Glmff right next to the privet hedge, and don't think I mean to be personal, but what with that Venusian green skin and all those tentacles and so on . . .

Yes, that's what I've been trying to tell you all along. When the spray from Auntie's watering can hit Mr Glmff, near as I can make out his metabolism must have jumped to the conclusion that the Venusian winter rains season had started. And right before my eyes Mr Glmff went into hibernation.

It was fascinating to watch really, the way all those tentacles curled up and folded away and Mr Glmff rolled right up into a fuzzy little green ball!

Auntie had no idea what she'd done, of course, and just trotted along watering her flowers as happy as could be. We knew she'd be terribly upset if she ever found out, so we called a meeting and we all voted to keep it from her. And later that evening, we just moved Mr Glmff along a bit, into the middle of the privet hedge and well, you'd never know, would you?

Naturally we realised that Mr Glmff would come out of hibernation once he dried off. But he was bound to be pretty mad at Auntie and we don't like to see anyone upset her. And there were practical considerations too, like the bill he was going to send us for all those Venusian cacti. I mean, we've had a lot of expense lately, what with the passenger lift and the hole it made in the roof and that Venusian air purifier . . .

So we really only acted for the best. You do understand, don't you? No, please don't scurry away. There's no rush, in fact we hope you'll be staying with us for quite a while

That's better. You just settle down for a nice long nap while I go and fill up the watering can again.

You see, during dry spells we have a rota system for the garden. And Tuesdays, it's my turn to water the landlord.

MICHAEL FELDMAN takes a closer look at the writer who dispensed

Philip

Before science fiction writing was any good, it was very bad. Not just in terms of literacy, for because of its peculiar nature, standards of literary merit have always been waived in appraisals of sf material, but in actual content itself. Practised as a form of juvenile-escapist fiction during the first half of the twentieth century, the most remarkable aspect of that whole period is that there was so much material, of real quality, produced in the first place!

By the early 1950s with atomic weaponry and space programmes sober realities, science fiction practitioners and readers started to take themselves more seriously. This didn't mean that the level of writing was raised, only that now it was treated more seriously and solemnly. Onto this scene, in 1952 came Philip José Farmer, a first class eccentric in the true sense. Not only did he write about things that no one dared write about in science fiction circles before, but he wrote it well, he was a genuine craftsman.

In case you're wondering what horrible thing he alone dared write about, well it was *sex*. Back in 1952, a most sterile time in recent history, sex was something only suggested, inferred or hinted at subliminally. What Farmer did to the subject that was so outrageous was to treat it naturally, even going as far as to suggest that There Was Something Good About It! This in itself, was enough to shake the foundation of high-minded science fiction fans everywhere; what right had this man to introduce reality and emotionalism to the hallowed arches of Science Fictiondom?

Not content to start small and work his way up, Farmer achieved instant acclaim, and notoriety, with his first story *The Lovers*; an unusual title for a science fiction story, the subject matter was even more out of the ordinary. He described a morality of the future and the possibility of man making not only cultural, but sexual contact with extraterrestrials. In a nightmarishly-oppressive future world of overpopulation and rigid controls under a socially and psychically repressive State-Church, Hal Yarrow, a jack-of-all-trades linguist,is doomed to a life of misery and frustration. He lacks the high degree of specialisation that will give him anything but the most mundane teaching job; and his wife of five years, chosen for him by a computer, seems to lack one certain response, the successful product of a society that professes love but negates sexuality —she is frigid! Salvation arrives in the form of an assignment as a crew member on a liaison mission to a newly discovered planet.

But soon after leaving, Hal realises that his mission is not merely to learn the language of the Wogs, the planet's humanoid inhabitants, but to pave the way for their eventual subjugation at the hands of his own colleagues. Contact with the Wogs, and a relationship with a female inhabitant on a sexual and emotional level beyond all prior conceptions bring Hal to the realisation that the values instilled in him by the State-Church are contrary to everything that is natural and positive in his own make-up. He understands that fear, repression and hatred are only conducive to dehumanisation and self-destruction.

In this story, as with so many others he would write, Farmer makes an open appeal for the release from sensual and emotional inhibitions. He remorselessly condemns the hypocrisy of a religion-veiled morality that suppresses the need for feelings, while sanctifying guilt, fear and frigidity. Although describing the attitudes of a 'future' society, the parallel with that world and the prevailing attitude in America in 1952, when *The Lovers* first appeared, is unmistakable. As a writer of science fiction he was treading on dangerous ground.

Farmer won critical recognition from the academy of sf writers in the form of a Hugo award for the best story of the year. His

A Chura

approach to the field, puritanical and tradition-bound as it was then, has been described as 'an explosion in a fresh air factory'. However, it was the various editors and publishers of the sf magazines and books who had the final say in the matter and to them Farmer's avant-garde treatment of other-than-normal themes became more and more disturbing. Over the next few years came a dearth of stories providing close scrutiny and critical evaluation of areas of human relationship and experience that had been mutely acknowledged as 'off limits' to the innocent science fiction reader.

In an overtly Freudian allegory *Mother*, Farmer's protagonist finds himself trapped, literally, in a monstrous womb from which escape can only come when he is able to break the psychic 'umbilical cord' which restrains him. After this open condemnation of the insidious influences of maternalism, Farmer went even further with stories like, *Father, Open To Me, My Sister* and others where he asked if the concepts of 'normal' and 'abnormal' were legitimate or whether they were merely the products of narrow-mindedness and socially conditioned prejudices. This applies not only to the subject of sexual relations, but to the deeper moral questions such as racial discrimination and religion. During this period Farmer also created one of his most amusing characters, Father John Carmody; a criminal turned Catholic priest, Carmody travels to various worlds where his human-conceived notions of divinity are often in opposition to those who derive their inspiration, quite often dramatically, from alternative sources. On one occasion, in the novel *Night Of Light*, Carmody witnesses a battle between good and evil in the form of monstrous manifestations produced by the collective will of the planet's inhabitants.

During the period of the mid-fifties, Farmer's most ambitious work took the form of a 100,000 word novel with a particularly strong religious theme—Resurrection. Tentatively titled *I Owe For The Flesh*, the setting was one of the most unique in any type of literature, the shores of a seemingly endless river whereupon the entire body of humanity (everyone that ever lived from Paleolithic times till the twenty-first century, some 35 billion souls) finds itself miraculously resurrected naked, youthful and apparently immortal. With sustenance provided and longevity (if a limb is cut off, it grows back; if killed, one is simply resurrected again somewhere else along the river) there seems little reason to question this already promised after-life, but there is more to this than God's will. Fate has singled out one man, Sir Richard Francis Burton, nineteenth century explorer, scholar, translator of *The Arabian Nights*, womaniser and adventurer, to sail up the river and discover its source, the meaning of this world's existence.

Revelation, as far as the reader is concerned, was not forthcoming. The book was never published! After a labour of love and single-minded intensity for the better part of a year, the promised payment for the story never came; the company that had eagerly accepted it had quietly folded! This was the final culmination of a decade's struggle as a writer. Unable to meet payments, Farmer lost his home and after years of just barely keeping his family by taking various jobs that included labouring, his venture into the science fiction field led him to be systematically swindled by publishers, mismanaged by agents, and ignored by critics and readers to whom new ideas were less than welcome.

Typical of the treatment doled out to him was that from John Campbell, editor of *Astounding* (now *Analog*), the most respected, widely circulated and best paying magazine in the sf field. Campbell consistently rejected material submitted by Farmer. As vanguard of the prevalent reactionary sentiment amongst sf professionals, he considered Farmer's work unsuitable. On submission of the story *Open To Me, My Sister*, Campbell hastily returned it with the comment, 'It made me nauseous'.

Most of Farmer's work was relegated to the poorest paying markets. In 1957 he started writing technological and military information, mostly in conjunction with atomic research and missiles. His output of science fiction was limited to a handful of stories over the next few years. Two excellent short novels *Flesh* and *Day Of Timestop* (retitled *A Woman A Day*) which both had the unique blend of religion, philosophy, psychology and sex, were both marketed as soft porn. The highlight of this period was a novelette entitled *The Alley Man* which appeared in 1959, the story of Old Man Paley, an illiterate junkman and ragpicker. With superb characterisation and dialogue, it seemed more the meat of mainstream writing. One slight 'difference' may be that Paley claims to be the last living pure-bred Neanderthal Man. Verification of this, if his appearance fails to convince, is his peculiar odour which allegedly makes him irresistible to any woman.

By the early sixties, the science fiction field had begun to mature. New young writers, unhampered by the limitations traditional sf writers and editors were imposing on themselves, had begun to tackle new subjects with more experimental styles and different outlooks. In 1965, one of the more outstanding members of this movement took it upon himself to bring together the many strands of this New Wave. Harlan Ellison was his name, and with a planned super-anthology of stories especially written for him, he attempted to completely open up the genre to give it new dimensions. He asked a number of the established masters to give him a story that they would like to have written but had previously thought could not be published. From the newer members in the field he expected something unique. to prove once and for all that science fiction was breaking new ground. From Philip José Farmer he just asked for something extra-special.

The volume grew to enormous proportions; double its word allowance and budget, it totalled a quarter of a million words. With an unparalleled list of contributors—from Aldiss to Zelazny—and with the receipt of innumerable awards for various stories, the book itself, *Dangerous Visions*, became a landmark in the field of sf writing. Abhorred by traditionalists and acclaimed by critics who normally wouldn't look at science fiction, the impact of those stories fell on all future works of sf and on all who wrote and read them.

The longest story in the book, almost a short novel, won a Hugo Award. The author was Philip José Farmer and the title *Riders Of The Purple Wage*. A vision of life 200 years hence, it is Farmer's most remarkable piece of writing. With a subject matter and approach unique to any kind of fiction, it would be impossible to describe. The first line gives some indication: 'If Jules Verne could really have looked into the future, say 1966 AD, he would have crapped in his pants, and 2166, oh my!'

As for reactions to the work? Well, a particularly lucid one was made by Ellison, a top-flight sf writer himself, in his introduction to the story: 'An editor should never show favouritism yet I am compelled by my awe of the story you are about to read, by my incredulity at the pyrotechnic writing, by my jealousy at the richness of thought and excellence of structure, to say that this is not merely the longest story in the book—it is easily the best. No, make that the finest. It is a jewel of such brilliance that re-examination and re-reading will reveal facet after facet, ramification after ramification, joy after delight that were only partially glimpsed the first time around.'

After turning a deaf ear to him for so many years, the readers and practitioners of sf writing found it impossible to simply pretend he wasn't there. Farmer had found his audience. The effect on him was one of revitalisation. For this new generation of readers, less easily shocked and more receptive to new approaches, he dusted off some of his older poorly-received stories and brought them up to date. *Flesh*, a decidedly sex-orientated piece, which had previously seen the light of day as a cheap paperback with a suitably lurid cover, was revamped by Farmer, almost completely rewritten with a greater amount of explicitness than had been allowed at the time of its original conception. Best of all, Farmer was given the go-ahead for some newer themes that he had previously been holding back. One of his themes, or perhaps the word obsession is more appropriate, is the myth of the Hero, endlessly recreated in legend and fiction, the 'über-mensch' who is superior in every respect, mental, muscular and sexual. The most famous modern incarnation of such a character is the creation by Edgar Rice Burroughs, of Tarzan of the Apes.

In true Farmerian form, our author makes the Jungle Lord the subject of exploration in not one, but five major works, starting with one of his more quietly fantastic novels, *Lord Tyger*. Ras Tyger, an innocent instantly likeable young demi-god, leaps through the trees of his jungle paradise, armed with only his knife, steel-like muscles and razor-sharp senses. However, in opposition to the best tradition of Noble Savages, he is a permanent threat to the men of the native Wantso tribe, whose male population he constantly taunts with regard to his superior endowment, 'Oh men with scarred and limping dongs, I send the great white snake whose tail grows from between my legs . . . it smells your women and it takes root in them as they lie by your side'.

Even more distressed than the Wantso men are Ras' adopted parents, two circus dwarves who adamantly swear that they are really apes and are constantly frustrated by their foster son's refusal to behave in true Tarzan-like fashion. Particularly with respect to his dalliance not only with native women, but female apes as well! Slowly Farmer reveals the basis of this surrealistic trip into popular fiction: a fantastically wealthy madman who has taken pains to vicariously enact his adolescent reading of Tarzan by raising his own Jungle Lord in strict accordance to the original Tarzan stories—even to the extent of kidnapping a blonde, virginal Jane for the purpose of mating his Ras Tyger. With typical Farmer aplomb, Ras does master his environment, but in a manner that would make Edgar Rice Burroughs turn in his grave. Not having said everything he wished to say, Farmer wrote *A Feat Unknown*, the chronicle of Lord Grandrith 'the true Tarzan'. Unfortunately the publishing temper of the time (1968) was such that the book only saw print as one of a series of pornographic novels done by a fly-by-night California publisher. Luckily though, it has been rescued from oblivion (all copies having been destroyed in a subsequent raid on the said firm) by Quartet Books, London who are reissuing the book and another of Farmer's forays into hard-porn-sf, *Image Of The Beast*, in the near future.

Next came *Lord Of The Trees*, a sequel to *A Feat Unknown*, forcibly cleaned up by the editors of Ace, a more respectable publishing outfit which represents, in Farmer's own words: 'Something unique, the only spinoff of a "clean" book from a "dirty" book.' And more? *The Jungle Rot Kid On The Nod*, wherein Farmer shows us Tarzan as if it had been written by William Burroughs instead of Edgar Rice Burroughs! What else is there to say?

Finally, *Tarzan Alive* was published as the definitive, documented, footnoted, bibliographed, annotated, indexed, actual biography of Tarzan (not his real name). Were the name of the biographee not so familiar to even the most

with the stiff upper-lip of science fiction and let his emotions show.

José Farmer

casual reader, it would be apparent to anyone picking up this volume that this was simply the biography of an Englishman, born in Africa in 1888, and reared by apes, who is still alive! His lineage is assiduously traced back through Burke's peerage, details of his career, and service during both World Wars are verified by actual historical records, even the transcript of a tape recorded interview is incorporated into the text of this remarkable document. For, as incredible as it may seem, Mr Edgar Rice Burroughs, despite whimsical exaggerations and the inevitable glossing over of facts, was recording the life and times of a real man! A god-like semi-immortal who for obvious reasons has chosen to allow the world to maintain the erroneous belief that he is only a literary character. It is left to Philip José Farmer to demonstrate to a blasé world that *Tarzan Lives*!

He also gives us an explanation of the apeman and a number of other superhuman phenomena of our modern era. If you were to visit Wold Newton in Yorkshire you would see a monument marking the spot of a meteorite landing in 1795. Three coaches were passing the place when the meteor struck, and in them were such personnae as the third Duke of Greystone and his wife, the rich gentlemen Fitzwilliam Darcy and his wife Elizabeth Bennet—the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*—Sherlock Holmes' grand-parents and a number of others. The radiation caused by the meteorite produced decidedly beneficial mutation to the descendants of these people. Amongst them they were to produce the living prototypes of such illustrious figures as Bulldog Drummond, Lord Peter Wimsey, Doc Savage, Nero Wolfe, Sherlock Holmes, Leopold Bloom (a day in whose life was recorded by James Joyce in his *Ulysses*), Professor Challenger, Raffles, Sir Denis Nayland Smith (opponent of the insidious Fu Manchu—who also existed) and a host of other outstanding, but less well-known figures. Farmer promises to give us the complete story on all these men and others, previously believed to have lived only in fiction. Already he has written the definitive biography of Doc Savage, as well as that of Phileas Fogg, with due emphasis on his 80-day trip around the world (fictionalised in Jules Verne's *Around The World In 80 Days*) which he has titled *The Other Log of Phileas Fogg*, a short bio of Kurt Vonnegut's sf writer anti-hero Kilgore, Herman Melville's Ishmael, *The Windwhales of Ishmael*—what happened to the first mate after his experiences in Moby Dick, and . . .

Farmer has taken science fiction writing as an opportunity to create his own universe and populate it with the people he knows, and loves, or hates most. The ultimate form of expression in this vein is his previously mentioned *I Owe For The Flesh*. In the mid-sixties Farmer toyed with an idea of a universe made up of layer upon layer of Earth cultures existing at the same time and place, unique yet mutually dependent. These books, *A Private Cosmos, Gates of Creation*, and so on, are a mere groundwork for the author's 'chef d'oeuvre', the final culmination of his many diverse lines of exploration, *The Riverworld*.

Farmer realised that now, a decade after he had conceived and executed the ill-fated *I Owe For The Flesh*, his audience was there, finally! Over a period of seven years he rewrote the original book in a form that has so far been published as two inter-related novels, and a short story. The first of these, chronicling Sir Richard Burton's afterlife in the Riverworld is entitled *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*. Burton, out of 35 or so billion souls, is selected by some unknown agent to lead a force of twelve selected individuals, whose ultimate mission will be to sail up the great river on whose shores they have been resurrected to find out why all humanity has been denied its 'final rest'. En route, some of the more familiar characters he encounters are Alice Liddell who as a young girl was the model for Lewis Carroll in his *Alice In Wonderland*, Herman Goering, crazed by religion and fanatic guilt, and John de Greystock, a twelfth century ancestor of a certain Lord Greystoke (Tarzan) about which little more need be said. Apart from his thwarted advances to Alice (he argues with her that her earthly marriage vows need not bind her to chastity) Burton finds himself brought to bear for various misdemeanours during his lifetime. Twentieth century Jews demand justification for his overtly anti-semitic writings, a rather minor crime in comparison to that of Goering, who is eternally tormented by his enforced immortality (he cannot take his life but is forced to suffer guilt-ridden for seeming eternity).

A. Chura

A compassionate novel, fantastic and outrageous, humorous yet deeply religious and philosophical, Farmer won the Hugo Award for it in 1972. A shorter story, *Riverworld*, appeared as well, revolving around an encounter between Tom Mix, star of American silent cowboy films, and a heretical malcontent of Roman Judea whom we know as Jesus Christ. The second major novel of the Riverworld involves Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known under his nom-de-plume Mark Twain. In the opening sequences of the book, *The Fabulous Riverboat*, Clemens has been searching throughout the Riverworld for his beloved wife Livy, from whom death on Earth has separated him. In the meantime, he is visited by the same mysterious stranger as Burton, who informs him that he, Clemens, has been chosen to captain the ship that will take the chosen twelve up-river.

With the meagre mineral resources, but vast wealth of twentieth and twenty-first century technology at his disposal, Clemens enters into a reluctant pact with the treacherous King John of England, to build the only piece of machinery in the world. John's motives, however, are inspired by the desire to become ruler of his new demesne rather than by any kind of quest for enlightenment. And in the course of building the fabulous riverboat, Clemens encounters some of his other chosen shipmates, Goering, Ulysses (of *The Odyssey*), and Cyrano de Bergerac—who has been living with Livy, the former Mrs Clemens, for over ten years! And she chooses not to go back to her former husband!

The final volume, although completed, has yet to be published. It is probably one of the most eagerly awaited pieces of science fiction. No less remarkable considering it won't be in print till over twenty years after its original conception. What else is Farmer up to these days? Well, he's been dashing off a number of strange stories with titles like *Don't Wash The Carats*, which he calls his Polytropical Paramyths. As for exactly what they are or are about, according to their creator: 'They're a form of fun-therapy for me and perhaps the reader. They're symptoms of something in my unconscious that makes me itch and then scratch. A sort of cerebral athlete's foot', which should instantly clarify matters for anyone who may read them and wonder. Another religious sf story has recently appeared as well, entitled *Toward The Beloved City*, this time involving the Day of Judgement. And most recently, of 1974 vintage, is a new novel called *Traitor To The Living*, which on first glance seems to be about the invention of a machine which can communicate with the dead, but as with most simple premises in Farmer stories, the implications expand geometrically.

And there you have it, a brief survey of some of the higher points of one man's writing career. A wild genius (a word used cautiously in reference to science fiction writers) who despite difficulties, such as intolerant readers, editors and publishers, not to mention plain bad luck, has persistently been inspired by the wonders and ecstasies of the universe to write in a genre that is for the most part ashamed of the fact that human beings can, and often do, have emotional experiences.

About technology and progress, he says that if they can increase and amplify our range of psychic experience, they're great. Like few other science fiction writers, Farmer writes about the emotions, and with them too. In fact if there can be any criticism levelled against him, it's that he's too emotional. Once he gets a hold on an idea, he refuses to let go. He often gets so wrapped up in his concepts that he neglects the writing aspect—the actual communication, which is vital if what he has to say is to be listened to. Many of his books, despite their brilliance, are written too hastily, downright sloppily. Many of his best ideas get thrown away in floods of abundant enthusiasm. Yet in all, there are few writers in any field who have encroached the range that this man has, or who so willingly approach the multitude of deep and unnerving topics that he is so prone to. There is no mystery too complex for Farmer to unravel, no line of thought, no approach too far out for him to try. In their own way, each new work of his can appropriately be described as a new, if not always pleasing, psychic experience in itself.

THE TERMINAL BEACH. Painting by David Pelham. (Courtesy Penguin Books)

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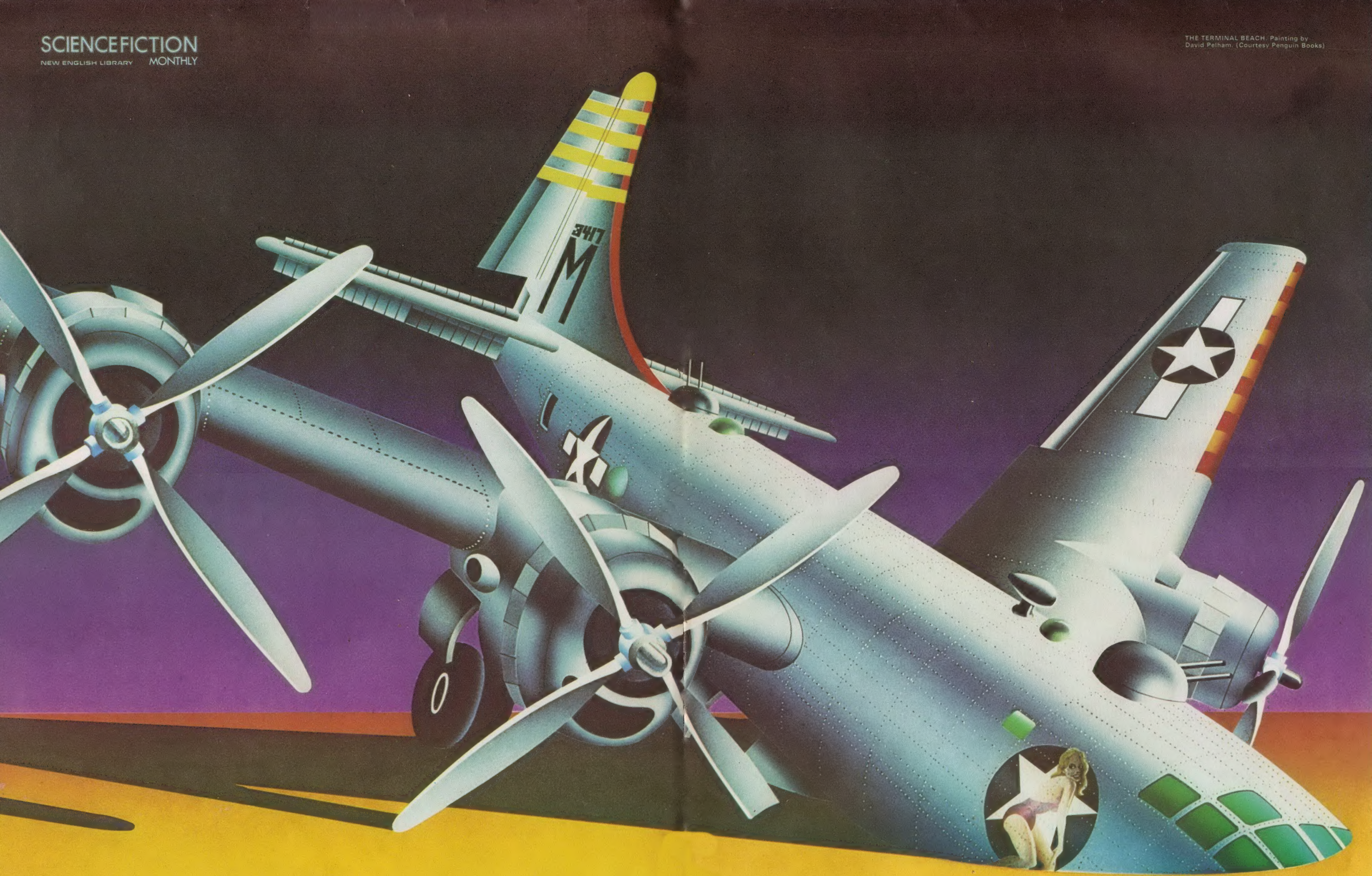

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